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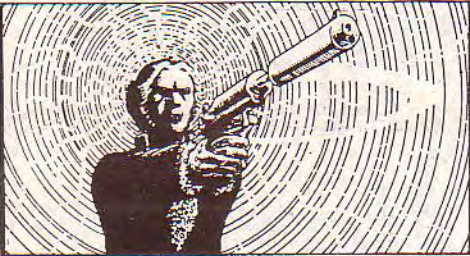
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Editorial

This is an issue I've been looking forward to. I read a lot of SF/Fantasy, good and bad, but a theme that appeals to me more than any other — since I used to be a historian — is where an alternative path through history is traced, and the characters find themselves pitched against real figures in disturbingly altered circumstances. Of all the 'alternative Earth' stories, one now stands out. Bryan Talbot's compelling Arkwright comic novel spans thousands of possible histories, from those where the sun never set on the British Empire, to those where it never even rose. Cromwell, Wilhelm II, and Hitler stalk across the pages, and behind it all, the sinister Disruptors weave their webs of intrigue and destruction.

Many of you will not have heard of Luther Arkwright before. After this month, I hope we will all hear more of him again.

Paul Cockburn

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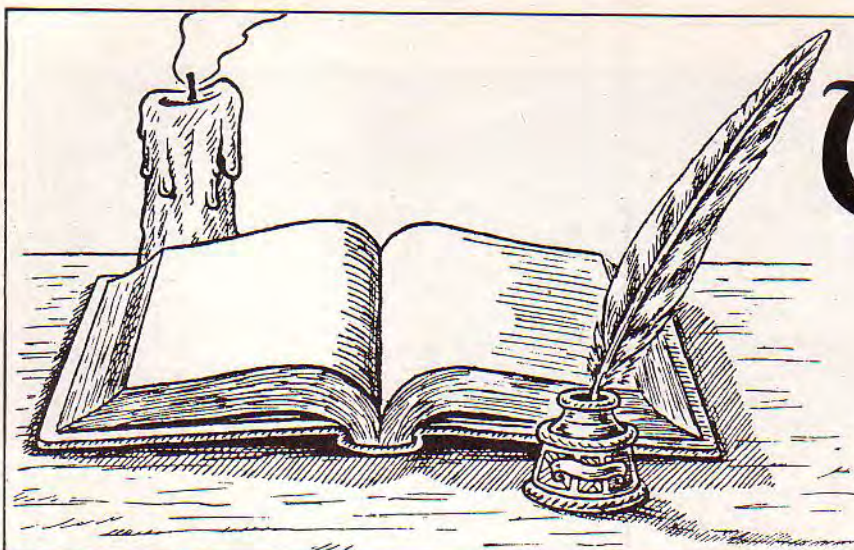
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Campaign Diaries

by Ed Dovey

In any long-running role-playing game campaign, a good system of recording game time is essential. The best method of achieving this is the use of a campaign diary, something overlooked by many Games Masters.

The first thing to do when setting up a campaign diary is to decide which calendar system to use. Although some game systems use their own peculiar calendars (the **STAR FRONTIERS®** game has a 400 day year and **Bushido** uses a system of 12 months of three 10-day weeks), I would strongly recommend a 365 day, 52 week, 12 month year.

This enables the Games Master to use ordinary week-to-a-view diaries. By searching stationers, particularly larger branches, around March or April, a sharp-eyed Games Master can pick up several at reduced prices. I usually buy three each year, as the group I referee tends to get through about three game years in one real year. An additional advantage of commercially produced diaries is that they often give holidays and Saints' days which can be used as festival days in the campaign. Good diaries also give dates of new and full moons — which is especially useful if there is a lycanthrope in the campaign — and times of sunrise and sunset during the year. Some desk diaries also number days and weeks, which is a positive boon to **Traveller** referees and the like.

Having purchased the diaries, re-name each month to give more of a fantasy flavour. You can work out your own names, or borrow them from other cultures or from fantasy fiction — eg Tolkien's Shire Calendar. When it comes to years, I find numbering the most practical (eg the year 1243 of the 9th or Atlantean Age). Alternatively, years can be named, as with the Chinese system (Year of the Lion, Year of the Dragon) or numbered within the reign of a particular monarch (8th year of the Reign of the Divine Queen-Empress Thasha).

Births, Marriages & Deaths

At the beginning of each game year I arrange births, deaths and marriages amongst the important non-player characters in the campaign — royalty and noble families usually. The method I use for this is based upon the one detailed in Tony Bath's excellent book *Setting up a Wargames Campaign*.

Births and deaths are decided in a random manner. In the case of births, roll 1d6 for each married NPC woman under 40 — a 5 or 6 indicates that she has become pregnant. If a 6 is thrown, the die may be rolled again, and another 6 means twins. Roll again for the child's sex — odds female, evens male. Single women can also be checked — in this case only a 6 indicates pregnancy.

NPC deaths are checked on a d10, a result of 1 indicating that death may have taken place. Dice again on a d6 — a result of 1-3 means that the NPC is dead, otherwise he or she is merely ill. Suitable illnesses can be found in the **AD&D™ Dungeon Masters Guide**. Subtract 1 from the initial die roll for every ten years above the age of 40. Causes of death can also be randomly generated, eg natural causes, accident, suicide or murder.

Marriages can be dealt with simply by consulting the various noble or royal family trees, selecting couples of marriageable age (16 and up, possibly younger in some cultures), and deciding if the marriage is agreed by the families using standard reaction tables. The precise date of these events is decided by dice. Roll a d12 for the month and a d30 (if you have

one) for the day within the month. You may want to bias the die rolls so that more people die during the Winter, or get married in Spring etc.

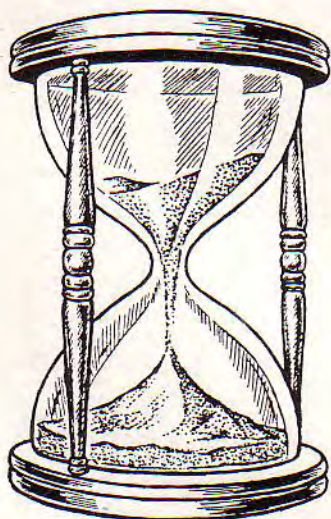
Public Events

Once NPCs' private lives are arranged, more public events can be added to the diary. These events fall into two general categories: those that take place over a period of days or weeks, and those that happen on specific days.

An obvious example of the first type is the military campaign season, which usually takes place in Summer, generating lots of employment for adventurous souls. The weather is fine, and the peasantry have little to do between planting and the harvest. Perhaps royalty inspect their realms during the Summer, travelling away from cities where the heat brings an increase in the risk of disease. During other seasons of the year player characters should feel different effects. Winter sees an increase in the difficulty of travelling, yet more monsters raid settled lands in search of food. Spring and early Summer sees an increase in the number of monsters as young are born and mature.

Specific days include all kinds of things, from the ever-popular tax assessments to religious festivals and market/fair days. Perhaps characters could find ways to advertise their services during a fair, and reach more potential customers. Perhaps they have to rescue a fair maiden from a high tower on the evening of the first Autumn full moon! Certain days might (as in the **DRAGONQUEST®** game) be better than others for casting spells, or collecting spell components — such as Midsummer Eve when it is ideal for the druid (in the **AD&D** game) to gather mistletoe. Wise men stay indoors on Hallowe'en (or its equivalent) as do wise fiends on other days!

Lycanthropy should not be the only 'magical' effect noted down. In the **D&D®** and **AD&D** games **charm** spells have to be checked at regular intervals to see if they have worn off — and in all games a careful record of time spent training, resting or healing should be kept.



I assign each day a 'weather number'. This is a random number from 0-9 and by referring to the table below, gives the prevailing weather conditions for the day. This number could also be used to determine wind direction (from the table on p54 of the DMG), with a 9 or 0 being calm. I generally assign the weather number a month or two in advance.

Weather table (Temperate)

Die	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
0	Heavy Rain	Heavy Rain	Heavy Rain	Snow
1	Heavy Rain	Light Rain	Heavy Rain	Snow
2	Light Rain	Light Rain	Light Rain	Heavy Rain
3	Light Rain	Dull	Light Rain	Heavy Rain
4	Light Rain	Dull	Dull	Light Rain
5	Dull	Fine	Dull	Light Rain
6	Dull	Fine	Dull	Dull
7	Fine	Hot	Fine	Dull
8	Fine	Hot	Fine	Fine
9	Hot	Hot	Fine	Fine

Effects

Snow: On the first day movement is at half speed. No movement in mountains. On subsequent days movement is at quarter speed and small bodies of water freeze. A single day of snow is followed by half a day of thaw, giving the same effect as Heavy Rain.

Heavy Rain: Movement is at half speed. Two or more consecutive days and fords become impassable. Throw a d6, a 6 indicating a storm.

Light Rain: All movement on the first day is normal. On subsequent days, movement as for Heavy Rain.

Dull: Movement normal. Throw a d6, a 1 indicating fog.

Fog: Vision reduced to 20-50 feet. Ships at sea must reduce to half speed.

Fine: Movement normal.

Hot: Movement at three-quarters speed.

Drought: A drought is declared after three weeks without rain (one Hot day will cancel one day of Light Rain, two Hot days cancel one day of Heavy Rain). Most rivers become fordable, and therefore unnavigable. Food costs increase by 10-40%.

It is when a party of adventurers goes on a long journey that the Campaign diary really comes into its own. Common failings in the handling of such a journey are the Games Master simply saying "You leave 'A' and after 'x' number of days, arrive at 'B'," or frantically rolling dice for encounters and referring to tables, while the players sit around twiddling their thumbs getting bored. I find that the best solution to this is to get your players to work out their journey in

advance, and give you precise details of the route they intend to take. You can then work out exactly how long the journey will take, and pre-roll all the encounters, noting down all the details in the campaign diary. Days on which something of note occurs, such as an encounter, or arriving at a particular location, are then underlined in red, so

gain some information from it, whether relevant or totally useless. Secondly, avoid repetition, otherwise you could end up with something like this:

DM: Day 2. You encounter a peasant.
 Player: Greetings, good peasant. What news can you give us?
 DM: Um.... er.... Hal Dickon's son has got a new shovel.
 Player: Oh, fascinating.
 DM: Day 6. You encounter.... a peasant.
 Player: Fine. We ride straight past him.
 DM: Day 8. You encounter.... another peasant.
 Player: We ride straight over him.

In an ideal encounter with a peasant the players would, perhaps, learn that the neighbouring lord, despite his apparent learning and culture, cruelly oppresses his serfs. And furthermore, there are dark rumours of disappearances in the village, and of sinister rites performed in the crypt of the castle at midnight. Repetitive or unsuitable encounters should be ignored.

Finally, the campaign diary can also be used to record the outcome of adventures and encounters, giving you a permanent record of your party's adventuring. The uses of the diary are not limited to those outlined here. Political events and random happenings could be introduced, although only develop as much material as you can handle comfortably. Never let your Games Mastering become a chore.

The only real limits to the campaign diary's use are the ingenuity and imagination of the DM.

Ed Dovey



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The DM can baldly announce the existence of the new inn; but how much more fun to have an NPC stagger wildly in with a knife in his back, and clutching an advertising bill!



Non-player characters (NPCs) of an interesting sort are vital to any fantasy role-playing campaign to give it plot. But NPCs are important in another way too. It is usually through the use of NPCs that a Dungeon Master guides the course of a campaign, and affects the actions of the players. Throwing a monster at the players merely sets them an obstacle to overcome. But skilful use of the NPC can influence what players do in much more varied ways.

A simple example: presenting an opportunity. The players are setting off for a routine dungeon-bashing expedition when they are approached by a foreign-looking person who attempts to solicit their services in regaining a sentimental keepsake stolen by bandits some miles to the north. This might be the start of a new adventure should the players accept the offer — alternatively, they might smell a rat, and, asking for time to decide, spend a while spying on said person, discovering — who knows what?

One thing you should note is that the NPC is normally the main channel of communication between the DM and the player-characters. Whereas the players themselves may wish to ask the DM about such things as interpretation of the rules, the player-characters themselves cannot ask the DM anything, as though he or she were some disembodied spirit hovering over them during the adventure. If they want some information about the nearest inn, or the price of some item, they must find a non-player character to ask. Of course, the quality of information they get depends on whom they ask...

There is one exception to this. There will always be some pieces of information about the campaign setting which can be considered absolute general knowledge — the player characters are deemed to know such things already, so it is perfectly reasonable for players to ask the DM what their characters already know about such-and-such a topic. For instance, a cleric in the service of the god Borg could be considered to know a certain amount about Borg and Borg-worship already, and would not need to ask an NPC for basic information about his or her own cult.

There are many ways in which one can use NPCs to steer the direction of a campaign. For instance, supposing the DM decides to set up a new inn in a more convenient location than the existing establishments, but in a spot not normally passed by the characters. He could baldly

announce the fact to the players, but how much more fun to have an NPC stagger wildly into the tavern where the player-characters are drinking quietly, and collapse in a heap, with a knife in his back, and clutching a scrap of paper. The paper subsequently turns out to be nothing more than an advertising bill for the new inn, which informs the players of its existence, and starts them off on a mini-adventure to solve the murder at the same time...

One thing that you should beware of is making NPCs too hostile. In both the D&D® and AD&D™ rule books there are strong cautions against running NPCs in such a way to make players' lives easy, but it is all too possible to err on the other side — I have seen it done. If all NPCs always rip the players off for all they can, and never give them an even break, and always charge grotesquely extortionate fees for the slightest service, it just puts the players' backs up.

It also makes the game less credible. Player-characters are not 'different' in some special sense from other mortals. An adventurer is certainly different from a village local, but there is no way that a village smith could distinguish between an NPC adventurer and a Player Character. Therefore if you decide that 20,000gp is the going rate for teaching a 2nd level spell to a magic user, then logically, that is the amount that a player-character could charge an NPC for the same service.

I am certainly not suggesting you should allow players to get away with raking in that sort of money from simple spell-teaching. Rather that you should make sure that player-character adventurers do not get unjustly penalised by comparison with NPC adventurers. If it is undesirable to have player-characters and NPCs swapping spells like crazy, there are other ways of discouraging it rather than fixing an unrealistic market price (my favourite is to make magic

illegal; then player-characters never know that they are not talking to a police spy and dare not mention spells).

Similarly, despite what it says to the contrary in the rules, it is often quite good to have an NPC or two to tail along with a party. If only three people have turned up for a game, all with only first level characters, it is so unlikely that they will survive a dungeon trip that it is scarcely worth playing. Unless the local butcher's boy pops up and says he's always wanted

A page for the
not-so-experienced
adventurer

by Roger Musson

to visit the dungeon and would the players mind having him along?

If you do this, never, never, never let the players run the NPC part of the party. If the butcher's boy comes along, you run him all the time. If the other adventurers want him to do something, they have to ask him to. You decide whether he does it or not. He may be a quivering nervous wreck after the first three zombies, and totally useless. Perhaps it wasn't such a good idea to bring him along? Or he might be the soul of curiosity, who keeps going over and pulling those interesting-looking levers that plunge the party down three levels. Definitely not a good idea to have brought him along!

In conclusion, a DM can have a lot of fun with NPCs. More fun, I think, to throw a well-designed NPC at the party and let them try to discover his or her motives, than to throw a spotted warpig at them to see how long it takes them to kill it. But keep them credible. Anything an NPC can or can't do, a similarly-placed player-character can or can't do too.

Roger Musson

Next month, Roger will be back with more advice for players and DMs. While he generally refers to the D&D and AD&D games, his advice is relevant to other games systems too.

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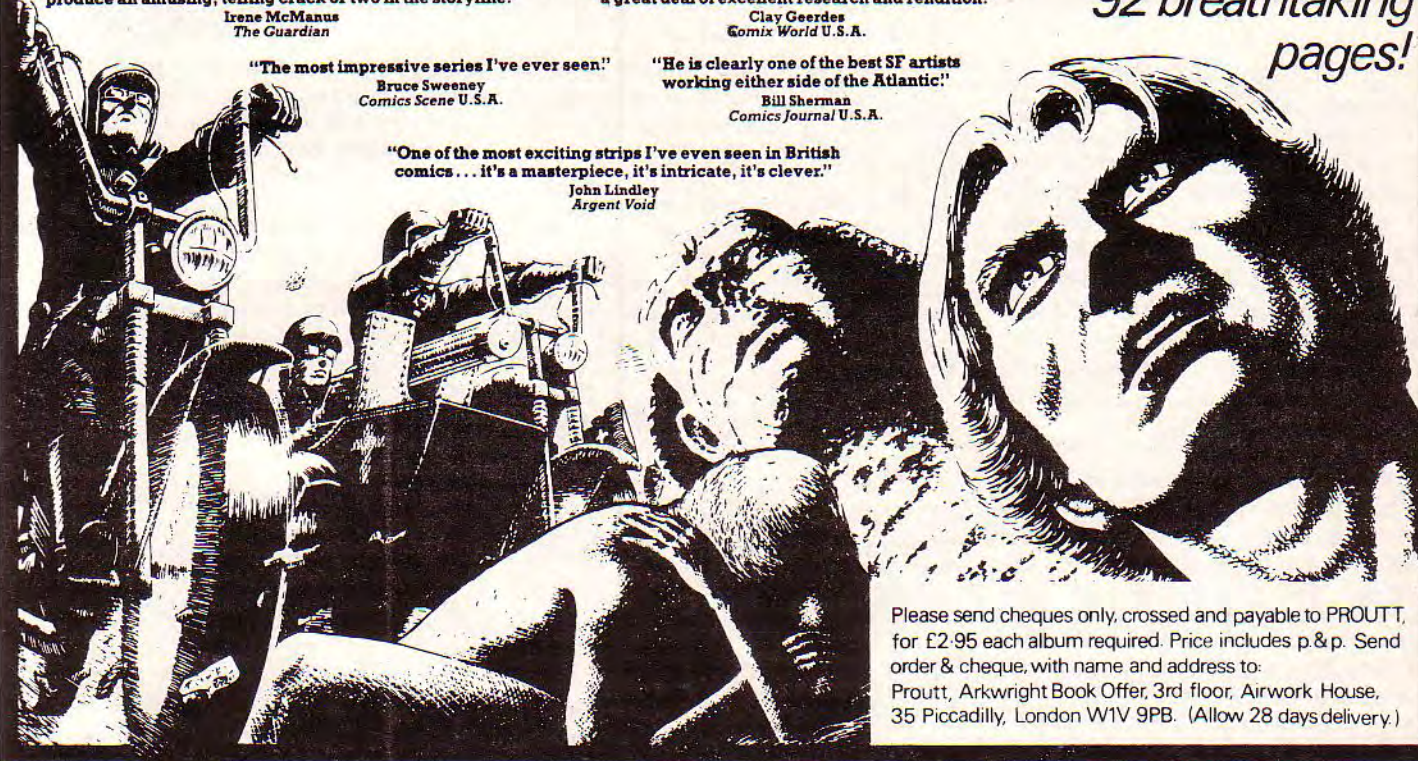
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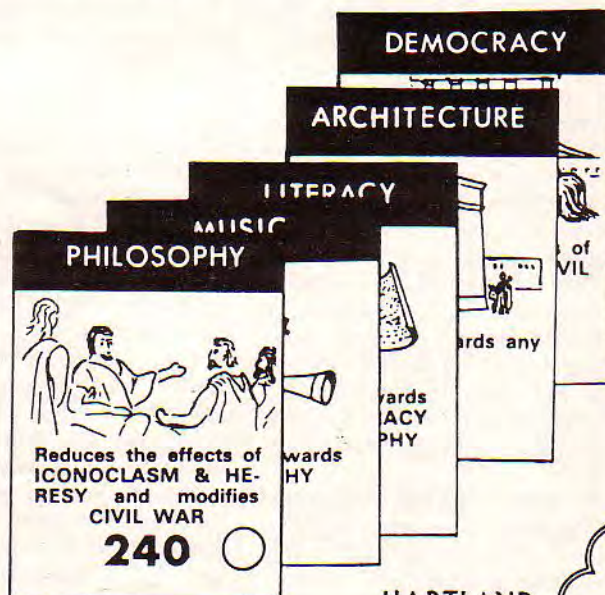
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FEATHERQUEST

The Tale of the Dreamer

by Neil R Gaiman

This is a tale they tell in ancient Khem, late at night when the fires are low and the candles are liquifying in their sticks; in Derana they tell it and in Tromilly; sailors tell it on the long passage down the River Xyths, that does not flow into the sea; the folk of the small islands of Andar, Vandar, Sandar and Giff know of it, but in Kharan they do not, and in Fasstiarelle of the sleepy towers they only tell it in odd-numbered months. In the marshes of Fogpool, where tax-collectors fear to tread, they tell it, and in Scryrrh it is told in the market places, by old men. They do not tell it in the city of Lost Carnadine, though I have spoken to one who claimed to have seen it written in a garbled form upon the walls of a public convenience in that remarkable city.

They call it the Tale of the Dreamer, and it begins in such a fashion:

There was in the city of Melk'arn, which is the capital of Hla (of the seven deserts) a certain man, whom men called Roan, which means constant, and he lived in the poorer part of the city in a house that had been his father's and his father's before him; for know you that the fortunes of men and cities change even as the gods decree, and in far off days Roan's ancestors were accounted among the nobility and were blessed with great fortune.

Alas, those days were long gone and Roan lived alone in the crumbling house without servant or concubine, and spent his days and nights studying the old books and parchments that were all his father had left when he quit this life. Young Roan was reduced to selling the tapestries and carpets of the house to buy food and candles wherewith to exist and to read at night, and in this he was frugal, for he bought the cheapest cuts of meat, and the last fruit from the vendor's barrows. In this way Roan passed his days. When his father died Roan was eighteen years of age, and when this tale starts his two-and-twentieth birthday had just come and gone, a fact which our hero did not remark upon, for in his dusty library all days were one, and he scarcely reckoned between them.

It came to pass that one night Roan slept in the library, as he often did, his head on a manuscript pillow. And sleeping, he dreamed a dream so cunningly fashioned that he was hard put to tell that he was not awake. For in his dream a stranger came to him and by certain signs Roan knew that the stranger was not a man but a djinn, for his eyes had neither white nor iris nor pupil,

but were instead made of flame, but withal he was passing comely to look upon.

'Roan,' he said. 'Roan.'

'That is me, Lord,' said Roan, for he was a well mannered youth.

'Roan,' said the djinn, 'I have come to tell you of your fortune. Say naught, but listen. You must leave this city and take ship for the Far Reaches; arriving at the port of Rilmeree you must travel by camel to Pundondor, where bad taste is considered a virtue and all men (and women too, if the truth be known) are improper, indelicate, ribald and obscene, and where they tell the tale of The Day That Abu Hassan Broke Wind while seated at the dinner table — and before the dessert.

'From Pundondor you must travel on foot down the popply road to Thelicum, where the bandit-wizards have their court, and from there to Utter Haslet, where the Pittites are, and the Pit. You must cross the ruddy Mountains until you are come to the bounds of the Calyx Empire. Take horse from there to the capital city of Captandum, where you must go to the house of the Emperor wearing red britches, a green belt, and on your head a purple hat, and great fortune and happiness shall be yours.'

At this Roan was much amazed, but he said nothing.

'To prove to you that this is no mere dream,' continued the djinn, 'I leave you this.' And with that he plucked a feather from his turband and placed it between the youth's fingers. Then he vanished, and Roan sank into a dreamless sleep.

As the first fingers of dawn brushed the sky he awoke. 'That was a strange dream,' he thought to himself. 'I must have been reading too many of the old romances.' Then he looked down and saw that between the fingers of his right hand was a feather, the selfsame feather that the djinn had taken from his turband.

'Oh,' thought Roan.

He knew then that it had been no dream, but a true telling of things to come, and straightway he went down to the harbour to arrange passage on a ship to the Far Reaches.

For if there was one thing that Roan had learned from his books it was that such dreams were not to be ignored. 'Although,' he thought privately, 'I do wish that the journey to great fortune were not going to be so perilous. I have no wish to travel, and the tales men tell of Utter Haslet (not to mention the Pit or the unlikable Pittites) are not calculated to fill one with pleasure; on the contrary, in fact.'

Due to the speed with which he had to sell his house, he gained only six hundred gold coins from the sale, of which seventy went at once to the ship's captain. He carried some of these coins in a belt around



his waist and the rest in the false bottom of his travelling bag. In the rest of his travelling bag he had some volumes of poetry and some clothes (amongst which were a purple hat and some red britches); also he took his toothbrush.

Nine days after he dreamed his dream (if dream it truly were) the ship set sail for the Far Reaches, and Roan stood on the deck and watched the land recede into the horizon. A sailor came to him, offering wine to guard against the sea-sickness that can come to travellers.

'Sea-sickness?' laughed Roan. 'Why, when I was a boy I would go out with the fishermen, and never have I felt or been — bloooughhh!'

He watched his lunch blow past in the westerly wind, from which it was eagerly snatched by passing gulls, washed his mouth out with wine and went below to his cabin. He lay in his bunk and moaned, sure that he would die and that his quest would be over before it was begun: every lurch and roll of the ship only served to convince him that his demise was indeed imminent.

Even so, within the week he had left his cabin and would wander over the ship getting in the sailors' way. Two or three of them were all for throwing him overboard, but staid heads prevailed, and in a while the sailors grew to tolerate him, and there was many a dry eye when he walked down the gangplank at Far Reaches, his bag over his shoulder.

The Port of Rilmeree was cosmopolitan in the extreme. Dark-skinned merchants rubbed shoulders with fair courtesans (I believe that rubbing shoulders was a gesture of affection; anyway it's a lot of fun) and dwarfish Faiorislers haggled with fat

amazons. Roan gaped at them all. Three identical sisters laughed at him.

Roan made a long nose at them, which convulsed them into giggles, and they passed on down the street.

He stopped at the stall of a seller of fruit. 'Where can I find the camel-trains?' he asked the man. 'Buy a melon,' said the fruit-seller, yawning.

Roan bought a melon. 'Where are the camel trains?' he repeated.

'I do not know,' admitted the fruit seller, 'but on that wall behind you is a map of the city. It'll be on there.'

There was indeed a map on the wall, and Roan found the Place of the Camel-Trains, which was just outside the Western Gate, with little difficulty. However, whilst he examined the map someone threw a rotting love-apple at his head. No-one admitted to the deed when Roan enquired.

Of the five camel-trains at the westerly gate but one was travelling to Pundondor, and it was with the hetman of that train that Roan haggled for the rest of that afternoon. The hetman was tall, with pepper-and-salt hair, a halo of white stubble on his dusky chin, and the wine-red nostrils that proclaimed him a user of s'hung — that drug that takes a man to strange worlds (and simultaneously destroys his sense of smell). They settled on the sum of forty gold pieces and the melon.

Roan decided that riding a camel was marginally worse than his shipboard experiences, especially when he lost the tip of the little finger of his right hand to one of the animals.

'It was your own fault. I told you to keep your fingers away from his mouth,' said the hetman, wiping his nose on his sleeve.

Roan felt sick most of the time. The insides of his thighs were red and crusted with sores; he was covered from head to foot with the bites of ticks, lice and fleas; he was miserable, and only cheered himself up by thinking of the djinn with the fiery eyes, and the future that awaited him in the Captandum, outside the house of the Calyx Emperor.

Scratching furiously, he wondered what it would be. From his extensive readings he could only see three alternatives:

1. A rich man would see him and adopt him as his son, he would marry the princess and become Calyx Emperor upon the present incumbent's demise.

2. The Calyx Emperor himself would see Roan, adopt him as his son, and upon his death Roan would marry the Princess and become Emperor himself.

3. The princess herself would, upon seeing Roan, fall deeply and all-consumingly in love with him, refusing to take food or water until Roan was brought to her bed (Roan's ears flushed an embarrassed red at the thought of this). After a comfortable week or so they would marry, the Calyx Emperor would shuffle off this mortal coil, and Roan in his turn would become Calyx Emperor.

Whichever way you looked at it, his prospects were rosy.

In three weeks of bottombusting stomach-turning pelfstinging sandburning travel they arrived at Pundondor, and three days later Roan set off down the popply road to Thelicum. Of Pundondor I will say nothing. Children may be reading, or people with weak hearts, and any mention of Pundondor would be offensive to most: for the men are all cads, bounders and rotters, the women are floozies, hoydens and frumps: all is coarse and vulgar, tawdry and rude.

Roan's journey down the popply road to Thelicum, that strange highway that does not stay still and sensible, but bubbles, roils and ferments like a rough sea playing at earthquakes, was uneventful; he had but three narrow escapes from death — although the count had risen to eleven by the time he walked away from Thelicum and its bandit-wizards.

I would tell you of Roan's imprisonment; his release by the mad king, Barnsman Thresher; the strange volcano; Roan's unfortunate transformation into a decorative ornament and his subsequent lucky release from this fate; and why it was wise

of him to bring some volumes of poetry on his quest; but these are all matters that are dealt with elsewhere at great length, and I would not presume to bore my readers by telling them a tale they already know.

Let us move on, therefore, to his arrival (sick, hungry and tired), in the ominous town of Utter Haslet. He had intended to avoid it originally, although now he changed his mind.

'For did not the djinn say that my future awaits me in Captandum?' thought Roan. 'Despite all that I have gone through I still live, and I am sure nothing in Utter Haslet could be worse than the indignities I have already been put to.' So saying he strode into the town of Utter Haslet, found an inn, had lunch and slept the clock around in a goose-feather bed.

On awakening he went down to the inn and ordered more food, which was set before him. The room was empty, save for a tall, dour man clad all in black, who stood by the door. Roan invited him to partake of the luncheon.

'Eat with you?' echoed the stranger. 'Aye, that I will.' And he seated himself at Roan's table, although he ate but sparingly of the food thereon.

Roan's attention was caught by a golden trinket around the stranger's neck. It was fashioned in the shape of something that was neither spider nor jellyfish nor yet a woman, but reminded Roan of first one and then another. He commented on it to the saturnine stranger, who made a pious sign with his hands.

'What is its significance?' asked Roan.

'That is one of the Mysteries of the Pit, but withal you will know soon enough,' said his guest.

'I take it that you are a Pittite,' said our hero courteously.

'Aye, I am one of the Sons of the Pit.'

Roan poured himself a generous measure of wine. 'And what does that mean?'

'It means that I am of the elect, and that it is my task to greet visitors to Utter Haslet, and to give them the opportunity of learning of the Mystery of the Pit, and of becoming ingested into its Mysteries.' The stranger drew a long, straight sword and put the tip of it to our beleaguered hero's throat. 'I thank you for the food, stranger,' he said grimly. 'Now, come.'

Roan picked up his bag and followed the Son of the Pit. On the far side of town they came to a deep pit, blacker than midnight and stark as a grave.

At the edge of that pit they paused. A score of the drab-clad Pittites, all tall and unsmiling, stood around gazing into the depths of the pit with intent, unblinking eyes.

'Would I be correct in assuming,' asked Roan of his captor, 'that the image that you wear around your neck is a representation of something that, uh, resides in the Pit?'

The Son of the Pit nodded.

Roan paled. 'How — how big is it?'

The tall man shrugged. 'It is written in the book of the Pit, "And behold, I shall come out of the nether caverns and I shall take my place in the Pit. And my hunger shall be great, and my needs shall not be insignificant. Of eyes shall I have eight, and of limbs I shall have eight, and on the



flesh of men shall I feed me. And my size shall be that of an elephant, only bigger'."

'Great,' said Roan.

The Pittites knotted a hefty rope around Roan's chest and lowered him into the Pit.

The Pit was deep, and Roan was most uncomfortable as they lowered him into it. The rope burned his skin, and often he would be swung against the sides. When on particularly large outcrop of rock had almost claimed his brains he called up, 'Hey! sons of the Pit! If you want me to reach the bottom of your Pit alive you had better take more care!' After that there was a lighter touch on the rope, and he reached the bottom without serious mishap.

The Pit floor was so far below the surface that Roan could see the night sky and the constellation of the Hanged Man far above, though it was noon and daylight outside, and he had seen no stars above the ground. The Pit floor was of undressed stone, with a scattering of bones, clothes and swords — many of them partly chewed or dissolved — that lay higgledy-piggledy on the floor.

'I do not like the looks of this,' Roan muttered, and the sight of the Dweller in the Pit scuttling discreetly from behind one boulder to the next did nothing to reassure him. Quite how many legs and eyes it had, Roan could not tell in the gloom, but it was unquestionably the size of an elephant, only bigger.

It moved almost soundlessly, a segment of deeper black in the inky shadows. A scuttering, then silence. Roan reassured himself by telling himself that he had had a dream and a feather that made his survival a virtual certainty; however he was not very convincing, and when something brushed his face he gave himself up for dead. Another scuttering in a far corner caught his attention.

'Either there is more than one of these Things,' he thought, 'or else it was not the foot (or worse) of a Thing that brushed my cheek.'

He turned slowly to discover the rope, which was being slowly hauled up and out of the Pit by the grim gentlemen above. The rope was now almost a foot above his head, and he caught hold of it with both hands and gripped it tightly. At once it stopped moving upwards.

'Frustrate me, would you?' muttered Roan. 'Well, even if you won't haul me out of this blasted Pit I can still climb!' and he started to drag himself hand over hand up the rope, which promptly lowered itself to the floor of the Pit once more. 'Caitiff, degenerate, rotten blighters!' he shouted. 'Pandering, perverted, scabstinking...' words failed him briefly '...grollocking knavies!'

And with that he seized the rope and gave it the strongest tug he could, to let the Sons of the Pit know exactly what he thought of them. From the corner of his eye he noticed something a little like a spider and a little like a jellyfish and somewhat like to a woman had taken advantage of his inattention to slip further towards him. He noticed also that the rock was dissolving and smoking where the dripping ichor from the beast's jaws touched it. Roan gave himself up for dead again, sat down and prepared to meet his doom.



There was a sound from far above him.

The rope started to pour and coil onto the floor of the pit. Squinting upwards, Roan made out three rapidly falling shapes and he guessed, correctly as it turned out, that his final tug on the rope had had more effect on the Sons of the Pit than Roan had dreamed.

The Pittites splattered onto the floor, each with his own distinctive thud, and the Dweller scittered away. She waited for almost a minute, her luminous eyes staring out of the shadows, until she felt sure that this was no trick but a genuine windfall, scittered back and proceeded to devour her erstwhile worshippers. She was halfway through the third when she noticed that the living sacrifice had gone, probably down one of the myriad tunnels that honey-combed the base of the Pit. She gave the spidery-jellyfish equivalent of a shrug and returned to her dessert.

Roan ran without stopping for mile after mile along dark and narrow tunnels, always choosing those that sloped upwards, often stumbling and falling and skinning his knees and hands and knocking his head, his heart thumping in his ears and threatening to burst out of his chest. He was panting and sweating. He ached in his legs and chest.

When finally he saw the light of day at the end of a tunnel he fell upon his knees and gave thanks to every god from Abiros to Zyxwths, many demigods, and also his djinn. He left the tunnel and found himself on a ledge, high in the Ruddy Mountains and gazing down on the tiny town of Utter Haslet, doll-like far below him.

Wrapping himself in a coat from his bag (which he had kept by his side though all his vicissitudes), he set himself against the wind and trudged off, up and over the Ruddy Mountains.

He slept in caves and in the crooks of trees, covered with all his clothes, his feet in his travelling bag.

At the end of the fifth day he reached a small inn that marked the bounds of the Calyx Empire, and he stayed there recuperating for over a week. As soon as he was able he set out for Captandum, mounted on a zebra-striped stallion which took cold and

died, forcing him not only to purchase a replacement, but also to pay for the horse's funeral. A very expensive affair.

When he arrived in the Calyx city of Captandum, mounted on a dapple-grey mare, he had but two hundred and fifty gold coins left.

In all his travels Roan had seen nothing to compare with Captandum of the tranced towers, for the very cobbles of the streets were semi-precious stones, such as amethyst, and chalcedony, and rainbow obsidian; white were the buildings, with golden balconies, on which the young folk of the city lounged, playing on silver lyres; the merchants each had wide and spacious stores in which their wares were tastefully displayed — jewels in great barrels and wines in lambent carafes; right nobly were the gentlefolk dressed, and many-coloured waterfalls played down the sides of the buildings. Roan donned his red britches and green belt and purple hat in a nearby convenience, then tethered his horse and took up his vigil outside the house of the Calyx Emperor, which was no house but a palace.

Now it so happened that a scant week before this, the daughter of the Calyx Emperor had dreamed a dream, and in this dream she was instructed thus: That a black-haired youth from far-off Hla (of the seven deserts), wearing red britches, a green belt, and a purple hat would come to the palace; that he was fated to be her husband, and, through his wisdom, the saviour of the Calyx Empire in a time of great need. She related this dream to her father and to the court magician, and the court magician adjudged it a true dream from certain signs and portents. Thus it was that each day the Princess Telalcla and her father the Calyx Emperor, and the court magician would stroll around the palace. For seven days there had been no-one that answered her dream's description, but on this day, as the approached the main gate, they caught sight of Roan.

'Tell me,' said the princess to the court magician. 'What colour is his hat?'

'Purple, and it please your majesty.'

'And what colour are his britches?'

'Red, and it please your majesty.'

'And what colour is his belt?'

'His belt is green, and it please your majesty.'

'It is he!' she hissed, and her father and the magician nodded.

Roan watched the procession approach. The court magician, a white-haired sage in a long brown gown inscribed with goetic signs, left the other two and came over to him. 'I greet you, traveller. How do you call yourself, and whence do you come?'

'My name is Roan, and I have come from Melk'arn,' replied our hero.

'And — hum, ha, — where is Melk'arn?'

'In Hla (of the seven deserts).'

The magician covertly signalled to the Emperor and the princess, making a circle of his thumb and first finger.

'And what is your profession, young man?'

'I am a scholar, sire.'

The magician was satisfied, and he gestured for the Calyx Emperor and the princess to join them.

Roan was struck dumb when he saw the princess, and when she smiled at him his heart almost forgot to beat. Her eyes, he thought, are twin stars; her mouth a rosebud; her breasts are twin doves and her hair was spun from the stuff of the sun itself. All this he thought, and more, and like one in a dream he dropped to one knee and doffed his purple hat.

The princess looked like someone had just slapped her with a herring.

'Look!' she exclaimed. 'His hair!'

For Roan's hair was a deep and rusty red...

'A trick,' muttered the court magician, who hated to be wrong.

'Make a fool of us, would he?' enquired the Calyx Emperor Himself. 'Take him down to the deepest dungeon, starve him until Thursday, torture him all weekend, and we'll have a public execution Monday lunchtime. In the Square of Scented Nightingales.'

Guards sprang forth, seemingly from nowhere, threw Roan to the ground and then dragged him off the deepest dungeon, where, alone and friendless, he was immured.

He lay on the floor of the cell, his bag serving him once more as a pillow, a thin trickle of dark blood oozing from his nose and from the corner of his mouth. 'There is something unfair about this,' he mourned. 'I have been sea-sick, covered in ordure, bitten by camel, flea, tick and louse, subjected to the indignities of Pundondor, rocked on the popply road, earthquaked, imprisoned, flung into a pit, almost eaten by the Thing in the Pit, hurt, lost underground, frozen in the high mountains, starved, sold an unsound horse, lost most of my money, and finally, when my recompense and reward was nigh, I have been thrown into a deep and disgusting dungeon where I now face impending torture, starvation and death. It is not just, neither is it fair.'

Plunging his hands into his bag he found a bedraggled feather, which he gripped tightly, and then reciting to himself certain words he had learned from his father's manuscripts in those faraway days in Melk'arn, he drifted into a lucid sleep.

In his dream the djinn of the fiery eyes stood before him. 'You called?' yawned the djinn.

Roan briefly outlined his situation.

The djinn shook his head. 'I can't understand it,' he pondered. 'You're *meant* to have black hair. It isn't well, a sort of... reddish-black, is it?'

'Of course not!' exclaimed Roan. 'It's red as a brick, and always has been. Can't you see?'

'Nope,' apologized the djinn. 'It's one of the liabilities of having flames for eyes. Colour blind. Even so...' he fumbled in his pouch and pulled out a scroll. '...mmm... mmm... here we are. "Visit Roan son of Frayne" — that's you — "Tell him to leave Melk'arn and take ship for the Far Reaches..."'

'It *isn't* me! I'm Roan son of Strepitus!'

The djinn gazed down at Roan with fiery eyes, sighed, then rolled up the scroll and put it away. 'Eblis!' he swore. 'The wrong

(once more by camel) to Rilmeree (losing a fingertip on the way, this time from his left hand) in which city he was beaten up and his last money stolen. Forced to work his passage back to Melk'arn, he fared no better than on the previous sea-voyage — worse, in fact, for great storms arose around the Tur'hian coast, and the sailors adjudging him a bringer of ill-fortune tossed him overboard. That the ship was struck immediately after by ball-lightning, killing all on board and breaking the ship up into drift-wood (some of which kept Roan's head above the water until he was picked up by a Vandarian trawler, the sole survivor) did little to cheer him up. He fared slightly better on the trawler, although he was unable ever again to eat fish, and on the morning of his twenty-third birthday — although he did not know it — he walked down the gangplank in Melk'arn, his home city, and he came to the house of his father's brother.



blasted address. And on my first job too. Trophaino only knows what kind of trouble I'll get into.'

He waved his hands and vanished in a puff of green smoke, from which an anguished wail of 'I just hope you're satisfied!' drifted and hung in the air.

'It wasn't my fault,' muttered Roan, then he got up, opened the false bottom to his bag, attracted a jailor and by means of extensive bribery escaped from the palace and the glorious city of Captandum (the Calyx Emperor was satisfied by the death of a red-haired man in the Square of the Scented Nightingales). By foot, and at night, Roan made his way to the Rutty Mountains, which he crossed. In Utter Haslet he narrowly avoided being flung once more into the Pit, while at Thelicum he spent an unpleasant couple of weeks in the form of a toad, only being retransformed by an accidental spell during the mage war between Barnsman Thresher and his eldest son, Seth. His naked flight down the popply road from Thelicum to Pundondor and the indignities he was subjected to in the latter crass city I shall draw a veil over. From Pundondor he travelled

All were overjoyed to see him, having given him up as one dead, and also they were amazed: for here was no longer the pallid scholar of bygone days. Here was a sun-bronzed, scarred and wordly-wise man. And Roan sold the books and manuscripts that he had left with his uncle, and with the moneys that he obtained he purchased a small shop in the Pale Quarter, and in this shop he sold amulets. And his affairs prospered, and soon Roan the merchant had three shops, and later, ten. And as his affairs flourished and prospered so Roan the merchant became interested in politicking, and he ended his days the Mayor of Melk'arn, his sons and grandsons around his bed, and with great lamentation of servants and womenfolk.

One may assume that there is a moral in there somewhere.

Neil Gaiman

Neil Gaiman is currently working on a book of SF/fantasy quotations. If you have a favourite good (or heroically bad) quotation, why not send it to Neil c/o IMAGINE magazine. Any that are used will be acknowledged in the book.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Anyone anxiously looking out for coverage of **GamesFair** must wait until next month, when there will be a full report, Poll results, and details of other events past and present. Watch this space!

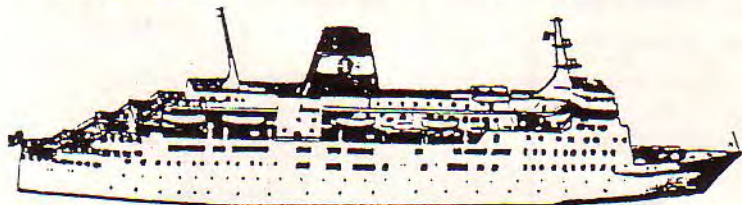
Starting with a northern bias this month, first on our list is **Tynecon II: the Mexican**, to be held at the Royal Station Hotel in Newcastle 25-28 May. This is to be an SF con, focusing on written science fiction. Attending membership £5. Details from Sue Williams, 19 Jesmond Dene Road, Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Next there is **Linercon II**, an event which organiser Larry Edgar is repeating due to popular demand. This novel con involves a cruise to Bergen in Norway, leaving North Shields on Saturday 23rd June at 7.30pm and returning on Tuesday 26th at 8.30am. It won't be a long stay in Bergen, but on board the

ship will be a live band, two bars, a restaurant, cafeteria, and a conference room for games playing. Concessionary rail fares will be available. For details, contact Larry at 15 Featherstone, Great Lumley, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham DH3 4NB. Tel: 0385 886596

Manorcon '84 will be at The Manor House, Birmingham on the weekend of 13-16 July. Apart from the Diplomacy Tournament, events depend on volunteers offering to run them, so for up-to-date information on what to expect, contact the Chairman Nick Kinzett, 11 Daleway Road, Green Lane, Coventry CV3 6JF. Tel: 0203 414759.

Other events to look forward to this year include **DragonMeet**, which will be in London on Saturday 28 July, and **Mythcon**, which will be at the Humber-side College of Higher Education, Hull, on September 7-8.



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PLAGUE HITS THE SOUTH

I am reporting to you from Southampton's East Street Centre, standing outside what seems like a perfectly ordinary shop.

Already since I began this report frustrated Mums and Dads have been dragging their offspring from the shop amid showers of abuse.

It is not until you venture inside that you begin to grasp how potentially addictive its contents are to the unsuspecting public.

Yes, you've guessed it, the shop in question is *Pastimes Games Shop* which sells virtually everything for the Traditional, Sci-fi and Fantasy role-playing gamer.

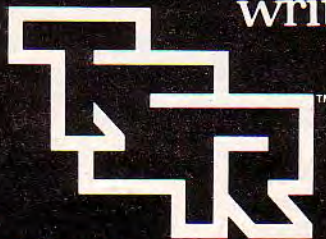
Since the Grand Opening in November 1982, its reputation has spread far and wide. Beginners can glean valuable information from experienced players through the 'Contact Board' and regular customers enjoy Games Club discounts.

Why not see for yourselves and visit:

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LUMINATION

TRANSATLANTIC TALES

Perhaps the most interesting thing to come out of our interview with Gary Gygax, Brian and Kevin Blume earlier in the year were the numerous plans for licensed products — 'tie-ins' — which will profoundly affect the development of the whole range of TSR products. Most immediate are the products of the close relationship TSR have struck up with Marvel Comics. The **MARVEL SUPER HEROES™** role-playing game will be arriving soon, and supporting modules will follow throughout the year. Also due in the near future will be the **AD&D™ CONAN®** modules and metal miniatures. Then, we know the **STAR FRONTIERS®** game is to have two modules and two boxes of figures based on the film **2001** and its sequel **2010**.

Then there are two complete new role-playing games, one of which may make a few of you orc-thumpers throw up your tentacles in agony. Yes, it's the

DYNASTY™ role-playing game! Get into 'multi-million dollar business deals' and 'clever ploys for power and romance'. Be Joan Collins for the day, and you too can.... well, y'know....

Perhaps more normal role-playing might be expected from the **ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES™** RPG. The full boxed game will be followed by three modules, the first two based on the films, and a figures range.

Make no mistake, this is an avenue that TSR wish to follow in the future. As Kevin put it 'we want anyone holding a license and thinking about gaming, to contact us first.' Ideas abound for the **TOP SECRET®**, **STAR FRONTIERS** and **AD&D** games, and there may even be one or two tie-ins for other TSR games systems.

BROOKSIDE™? MINDER®? Who knows....

Getting an Edge

Leading Edge Games, an American company, is hoping for its share of good luck with a friendly little game called **Small Arms Spectrum**. They claim that it is the most realistic small arms combat system ever, and can be used on its own as an improved weapons system in other games. Rather alarmingly, they promise that it 'accurately recreates the feel and reality of small arms combat'. Passing timidly over the sanguinary implications of that boast, we run headlong into the assertion that it is the 'only firearms game to accurately simulate gunshot wounds'. Good show. Just for the record, this game does away with hit points and other 'inaccurate conventions', offering detailed aiming and firing rules, and record-free simultaneous movement. Rules for 200 weapons, from flintlocks to energy weapons, are included. The price for **SAS** (now you see why it has such a contrived name) is \$13. No UK importer yet.

What's Up, Doc?

It's pleasant to turn from uncompromising brutality to the pastoral delights of **Bunnies and Burrows**. Actually, the air of bucolic tranquility hardly extends past the title since the Bunnies in question are quite likely to rip you to pieces given the chance.

Bunnies and Burrows is a venerable RPG, and its rules are a little old-fashioned. However, it would be impolite to discuss its shortcomings since B&B, you see, has made that mysterious transition from being just another game to being a 'cult'. In the US, its adherents are busily organizing a National B&B Association, while in Britain Steve Tollyfield is well advanced with plans for a B&B fanzine. All this has been achieved by a game that receives no publicity and has no modules, supplements or play aids available. People just like Bunnies! Anyone interested in the new 'zine, to be titled **Warren Lore** should write to Doug Cowie c/o **IMAGINE** magazine, and their letters will be forwarded to Steve.

Small News

After several months of rumours, assertions, denials and confusion, it seems as though Chronicle Miniatures are definitely closing down, with proprietors Nick and Celia Lund reappearing at Citadel. Nick is to concentrate on designing, with Citadel releasing the results of his labours as 'Nick Lund' figures.

Asgard, another well-known figures company — one of the first to produce figures for

RPGs — are also undergoing a change in corporate identity. They are merging with the distribution company Sanders International. The first tangible results will be the packaging of their figures in fashionable blisters. Asgard's Paul Sulley assured me that the famous Asgard name will not be disappearing however, which is welcome news for this part of the history of British role-playing.

Born-Again Virgin?

Despite the best efforts of the liquidator, it has not been possible to sell off the **Games Centre** organisation as a going concern. However, the prestige site in Oxford Street has been acquired by **Virgin Games**, who have been rumoured as dark horse contenders for quite some time. They have succeeded in their bid despite determined opposition from established companies in the games retailing field, and in view of their penchant for innovation in the past must bring a new and exciting dimension to this fresh enterprise.

The Latest Word

FGU's **Privateers and Gentlemen**, the game of naval life in the 18th and 19th centuries, has been unusually successful for a historical RPG. The first adventure pack, **King Over The Water** is now available at £4.35, and hard on its heels comes news of the second, **Decision at Djerba**, an early Napoleonic campaign off the North African coast, will be available soon at £3.65.

Accompanying it from the same publisher will be the next **V&V** adventure **Dawn of DNA**, with colour, cut-out card counters.

Later in the year FGU promise two more **Space Opera Star Sector Atlases** — **Atlas 3, Auziach Imperium** and **Atlas 5, Ranan Horde**.

Still no news of the long, long awaited **Ninja: Shadows over Nippon** scenario for **Bushido**. Any severely deprived Bushido enthusiasts interested in taking part in a small scale invasion of New York City with a view to capturing a few FGU executives and holding them to ransom until **Ninja** is released should contact me c/o Port Stanley Penguin Refuge.

Shaken, Not Stirred

Victory Games' **James Bond** role-playing game didn't exactly take the nation by storm, but it has got itself nicely established now. Victory recently added two new items to the system. There is another adventure module, **Dr No**, at £6.95, with an illustrated Games Master's guide, an agent's briefing dossier and a floor plan of Dr No's fortress. As always with these Bond modules, the story line has been sufficiently changed from the original to prevent those familiar with it from knowing what will happen. The trick is not to change it so much that it loses the flavour of the film. The other new release is **For Your Eyes Only**, a GM's supplement. It provides characteristics and background for characters from the Bond films, and takes a look at the dangers of being captured. **Aficionados**, recalling **Casino Royale**, will be aware that these dangers can be painful and fundamental. **FYEO** is £7.95.

COMPUTERS micro COMPUTERS

The Imagination Machine

Small is Beautiful

One of the features of the home micro boom was the opportunity it gave to so many people to set up in business on a small scale.

This was usually done by writing tape software, booking a small-ad in a computer magazine, and waiting for the orders to roll in. Meeting five orders meant running off copies of the program onto cassettes, with a typed (or handwritten) label, and posting them off. This is by no means a thing of the past, as a glance at the classifieds columns of the weekly micro magazines will confirm.

The recipe for success

Why was this approach so successful? It was partly a matter of producing goods with a rarity value catering to minority interests. Although the owners of the more popular micros could obtain as much software as they wanted from larger distributors, games for the Ohio Superboard or TI99/4 were as difficult to find as a game of *Bunnies and Burrows* in Manchester on a wet Sunday afternoon.

But the main reason was the unique production medium, essentially a constant-unit-cost process of running off one cassette after another. There was no need for a large-volume run, as with any product involving printed components, where there is a high set-up cost to be spread over a large number of copies, in order to keep the unit cost low.

Purchasers of these products seemed happy to accept instructions in the form of photocopied typescript or on-screen messages at the beginning of the game. Not having to commit oneself to a minimum print-run of, say, 2,000 copies of documentation and packaging meant that the entrepreneur did not have to make a large capital investment in the project, and would not be much out of pocket if there were very few buyers.

This new market certainly provided opportunities for a few enterprising businessmen who went on to greater things; about half the software houses now occupying the Top 50 started in this small way and built up gradually, although they were not able to maintain the policy of zero capital investment indefinitely.

There were of course some negative aspects to the situation. If you create, manufacture, package and market your own product, there isn't anyone to point out to you how bad it is, and some truly dreadful material found its way onto the market in this way. It could be pointed out that the situation has not changed all that much, now that software comes in print-runs of 20,000 with expensive packaging and even more expensive hype. Although it is probably true to say that the best software is better than anything seen before 1981, there is still a fairly high proportion of junk, and the worst is just as bad as the efforts of the low-run pioneers of the early days.

So the computer games hobby was almost unique in the field of specialist gaming, in allowing anyone with a minimum of equipment and capital to set up in business; the closest analogies would be with the back-room casters of specialised miniatures figures, and perhaps the publishers of some of the amateur FRP zines, providing additional material and scenarios for the more popular role-playing games. But now it may be that the same thing is about to happen in other areas of gaming, as a result of new printing technology that has become available in recent years.

New Technology

Everyone has heard of the new technology, generally in terms of the problems experienced by newspapers attempting to introduce it. The processes involved are, briefly, the computer-assisted origination of text, replacing the old linotype machines; VDU layout of whole pages with graphics and photos; photo-typesetting laser copying; and colour filter photocopying.

What we are concerned with here, however, are the small-scale versions of these processes. Text origination can be carried out using word-processing software, available on most home micros. Copy is produced by daisywheel or high-quality matrix printer rather than by phototypesetter. Printing is by photocopy, which can be a multi-pass colour copier.

There is always some loss of speed, quality or both when compared with top-

range equipment, and indeed the machinery being introduced at the bottom end of the market is still quite primitive. But it is growing in sophistication very fast; as the technology becomes familiar, quality improves while the cost remains constant or even falls. Nor are special skills needed to operate the new machines.

At the same time, costs of conventional printing continue to escalate. This is particularly clear in the States, where cover prices of magazines have shot up alarmingly during the past two years. This has not been matched by an equivalent growth in earnings in other countries, with the result that most imported American magazines have priced themselves out of the UK market and have come down to minimal circulations. It has also been a blow to the ambitions of people who wanted to produce game packages, using conventional printing methods, for a UK audience; the number of potential buyers is not enough to use up the necessary large print run.

But now there is the possibility of producing games with any amount of text, colour artwork, etc., on a small scale (100 copies and up), with a very limited capital investment. The full potential of this equipment is still being explored, but instant print is clearly the pattern of the future. Conventional printing can only become more expensive, while the cost of alternative processes continues to fall. The phenomenon of the lone entrepreneur selling products on magnetic media is the precursor to a much more general application of the same approach, allowing most types of product — including almost any type of game package — to be created in the same way. And, of course, there will be the possibility of mixed-media packages, that is, computer games with elaborate physical components, yet produced for a specialist market of only a few hundred purchasers.

How soon will all this happen? That is not so clear, and the first wave of such products may include a lot of poor-quality material. But anyone who is disillusioned with the existing marketing and distribution channels for commercial games software ought now to be investigating the new technology.

Mike Costello

COMPUTERS micro COMPUTERS

PHK

The Imagination Machine

CITY

This game from Terminal Software comes in some of the nicest packaging I have seen so far, a semi-rigid case with the cover depicting a modern city at night. Unfortunately the instructions are limited in amount by being printed on the back of the cover and do not say much.

The game can be played by up to four players; if less, the Spectrum takes other parts. It is a game of property building and acquiring money; you get £200,000 to begin with and aim to make a million before the others to win the game. The only resemblance to a well-known board-game is the presence of JAIL, a sort of speculators' limbo, where you go if you bump into another player. It is unclear whether you are credited with your investment in property or just your cash in hand when assessing whether you have got your million. It is said to be a 'real time better than a board game'. Before loading it I was quite well pleased by it.

It seems to load well but the first problem is that there are two sides to the program for different TV displays (what the difference is, they don't explain) and both sides are labelled as being on one side which I found a trifle confusing. It is mainly BASIC with a smattering of machine code but there is a SAVE feature, so back-up copying should work OK. Upon loading, it displays a series of prompts that you respond to by pressing a single key; the instructions are to press the INV.VIDEO key but in fact what they mean is 'press the letter key that is shown in inverse on the screen'. A small fault, but symptomatic of the programmers' lack of consideration for the user.



On entering the game you are asked to name your Company. Almost any short name will do, though it uses lower case and I prefer to reset it to capitals. You are then given the first view of the city (always the same) and we are off.

The display is of a maze-like set of streets using the top 20 lines of the TV screen. You move around the area using the arrow cursor keys and if you collide with the side of the street you are able to build something. A whole variety of building options is available to you; each has its own graphics symbol and each is shaded in its own company colour (very hard on the eyes this). Thus you go merrily around putting up all manner of structures, oblivious most of the time to the purpose behind it all. Every now and then a demented flashing square goes hurtling across a line of the display, is it a bird, is it a plane? No, it's Superrentman collecting some money from the properties he passes over.

Given the different types of building and demolition activity open to a player, there should be a lot of scope for financial strategy and crafty planning. The program works in days, each day allowing one player one move, each move lasting up to 20 seconds and each day lasting up to a minute. This is the time you have to assimilate all the information, plan your move, get to the keyboard and vacate it for the other players. I find the display far too cluttered to be able to tell anything clearly so I ended up with the optimum playing method of holding down one key and fingers crossed. Even by yourself this is difficult, let alone the spectacle of four people leaping into and out of chairs in turn. I tried really hard to like this game, and failed dismally. I find the rules to be hidden away in the program, and you have to play the game in order to discover what you should have done but couldn't because you didn't know then what you know now. The rules are displayed in small segments and then removed from view. There is a logic to certain types of building and there are ways of blocking your opponent; but by the time you have found them you will be as bored as I was.

You can find out how much it costs to build different types of structure, but you cannot keep a copy unless you BREAK

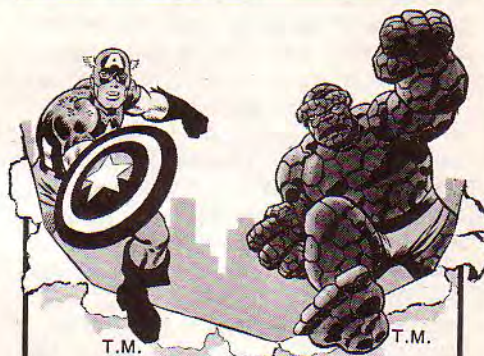
Game Review

and LLIST the required part of the program. This is a clever piece of programming that has not been made accessible to humans; it needs a proper printed set of instructions, and even then you would have to contend with a crowded display and very rapid decision making. I was not impressed.

R J Neilson

CITY for the 48k Spectrum from Terminal Software, 28 Church Lane, Prestwich, Manchester, costs £6.95.

The Imagination Machine is a regular monthly column compiled by Mike Costello, editor of PBM, Wargame News and the War Machine.



MARVEL SUPER HEROES™

Role-Playing Game

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FIREFROST

by
Brian Talbot

Ours is not the only existence — not the only timestream on which there is an Earth. There are others and, like the planets in space, there are an infinite number. But unlike the planets, these other worlds are separated from us not by space but by barriers we cannot perceive and a dimension our science has no name for. These Earths exist parallel to our own; echoes of a basic blueprint, each one unique in some way. On some Earths the Thousand Year Reich is a hard reality, some may still have dinosaurs as the dominant life form, some may just be atomic wastelands as a result of global conflict.

Across the civilised parallel worlds a secret war is constantly being waged for their control between mysterious organisations known collectively as **Disruptors**. Working mainly through indigenous agents they have manipulated the course of history to their own ends on many different continua, engineering wars, *coups d'état*, plagues, peace treaties, industrial revolutions, assassinations and the like for at least fifteen centuries.

Most of their agents are dupes; pawns in a scheme far greater than they comprehend. Naming their lodges with titles like **The People of the Truth**, **The Rationalists**, **The Cult of the Guardian Angel** and so forth, they adopt quasi-religious, political or criminal fronts with a screening system of initiation rites designed to be training grounds for fanatics. The rank and file members of these secret societies are ignorant of the higher levels of authority, which in turn blindly obey the orders they receive from the Disruptor elite power group. The location of Disruptor Command is a carefully guarded mystery — it could be on any of the myriad parallel time continua. Orders from Disruptor Central Command are directed through sophisticated communication terminals available to only the one or two key agents who are uppermost in the Disruptor hierarchy on each parallel. In return for following orders these overlords, who are usually heads of state or religion, receive aid from the Disruptors — usually in the form of information they can convert into technology of a higher level than that of the world they inhabit — thus enabling them to maintain the dominance of their particular sphere.

If the members of these secret societies are the Disruptors' pawns, then the secret leaders are their bishops. And they also have their knights and rooks.

The knights are rarer. These are special operatives, able to traverse and enter different timestreams by the use of

interdimensional shuttlecraft — strange tubular structures powered by psionic energy sucked from the fabric of space-time by Disruptor machines. Their rooks are super-soldiers, a powerful strike force.

Many worlds, of course, are still free of Disruptor influence and it was on one of these, a stable parallel in relation to much of the multiverse, that an agency arose that could attempt to check their activities.

On this Earth the Middle Ages in Europe saw the rapid growth of the Holy Roman Empire. The Germanic states were united and strong and proceeded through diplomacy and war to either annex or conquer the countries of the civilised worlds. Dominated by the Empire, neither England, Spain or France developed as major powers and by the end of the 17th Century the Boy Emperor Frederick X and his decadent court held sway over the entire globe. But another power had been rising. The technological revolution started by Gutenberg and the Medieval Alchemists and accelerated by the expansion of the Empire had grown at an unprecedented rate. Science had become the new religion and the Futurist Renaissance was the movement of the people. The military coup, execution of Frederick and the establishment of a dictatorship based on the principles of the Advancement of Science was inevitable, merciless and brief.

The effects of a world ruled by a scientific elite were dramatic. By 1800 John Dalton had perfected his Theory of Relativity. By 1820 man had landed on the moon. By 1850 world poverty and famine were abolished. Then in 1881 Karl Marx proved the existence of parallel worlds and proposed an annotation system to designate different continua using his own parallel as a norm; 00-00-00, 00-00-01, and 00-01-00 would be 'flanking' time streams and so on.

Over the centuries the dictatorship had mellowed into a benevolent one. In 1900 the dictatorship was dissolved and the World Government established. ZeroZero became the first technologically advanced Earth to live in harmony with itself, freed of religious and racial dogma and maintaining ecological balance.

One of the first acts of the administration was to initiate the **Valhalla Programme** to monitor parallel worlds and observe the effects of multiverse fluctuation on historical trends. London was chosen as the site of the giant **Valhalla Nova** complex that would house the most advanced technology of the time. The hyper-computer **W.O.T.A.N.** was an

integral part of the structure — scanning the continua, correlating, analysing and displaying information, assessing probabilities and issuing directives.

It was 1905 before the complex was operational and W.O.T.A.N. extrapolated the existence of the 'Disruptors' (as it named them) and their activities. The government immediately authorised the section leaders of Valhalla Nova to take steps to counter the Disruptor influence. W.O.T.A.N. was given additional programming to adapt to the new situation. An agency within Valhalla Nova was set up to deal with field operations, although ZeroZero had no means of breaching the dimensional barrier — no means of travelling across the parallels. However there was another way.

Psychic research had been a science on ZeroZero for 150 years and not only had the ability of human minds to hook into and use psionic energy become an established fact but it had also found methods of developing and enhancing psi-abilities. One of the Psi-section's most astonishing finds was the **Empathic Link**. Psychics who possessed this power could, through concentration, communicate with their parallel selves on other continua. Although extremely rare, Valhalla Nova employed these as their Field Operatives — usually using them to set up anti-Disruptor espionage networks within their individual alternatives and reporting back by thought transference to their selves on ZeroZero. It was several years



later, in 1958 after the capture of a Disruptor lodge and its communication equipment, that W.O.T.A.N. developed

the quantum theory and technology necessary to enable ZeroZero to construct audio-visual communication terminals similar to the Disruptors.

Since then ZeroZero has been fighting the Disruptors continually — but at a safe distance, like a doctor trying to cut a cancerous growth from a patient's body. But something was to emerge that would not only endanger their world but also threaten devastation to every single Earth in the multiverse; FireFrost.

In 1913 on the parallel designated **00-72-87** JR Montpellier, a French archaeologist, discovered an ancient Egyptian scroll in a hidden chamber beneath the Temple of Ra at Heliopolis. The professor was subsequently killed and the artifact, the **FireFrost Codex**, stolen from the *Musee National de Paris* by Disruptor agents. Taken out of context, this event would appear to have little significance. However, as W.O.T.A.N. had already perceived, 00-72-87 had a remarkably singular feature; a mythology that was completely unique — especially the Egyptian line. This centred around the legends concerning **The Fire Opal of Set**. According to the mythos the magical Fire Opal was created by Set, the god of Evil, as an awesome weapon of unlimited power.

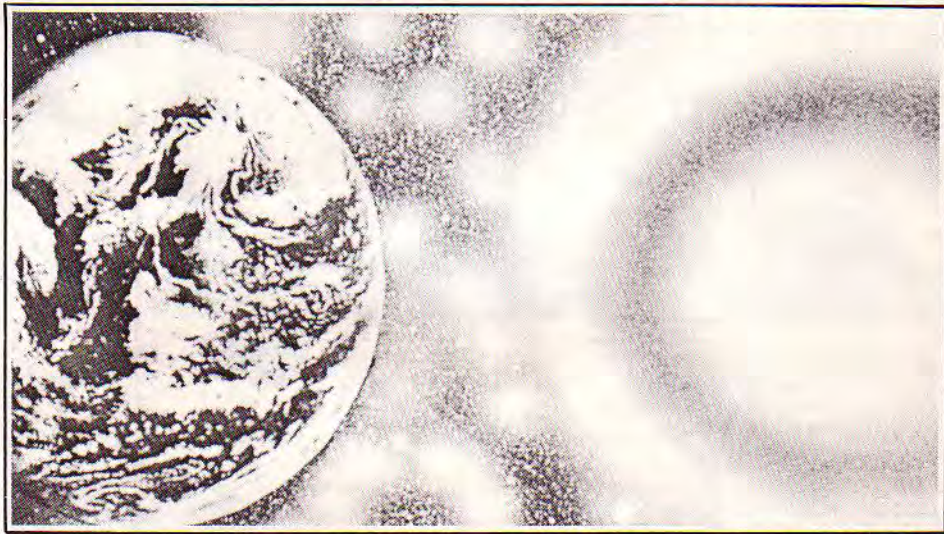
The two disturbing projections to issue from W.O.T.A.N.'s probability Matrix were (a) the 97% likelihood of some solid, material basis for this deviation from conventional Egyptian mythology, ie the existence of FireFrost, and (b) the 55% possibility that the location of this powerful weapon was contained in some form of cypher within the hieroglyphics of the FireFrost Codex — now in the hands of the Disruptor Elite. The Disruptors did not appear to act immediately on the information they held, but over the passing decades W.O.T.A.N. was constantly alert for any movement in this direction.

In 1964 on parallel **00-30-22**, a very similar timestream to our own, Luther Arkwright appeared. He was fourteen years old and had escaped from a Disruptor training station. A product of advanced genetic engineering, he had been groomed from shortly after birth to be the ultimate Disruptor agent. And, like FireFrost, he was unique. He was conceived on only one parallel and his escape was made without the use of machinery. He could actually cross from one continuum to another by a psionic energy generated by force of will, and after rebelling against his programming had spontaneously and instinctively flung himself across the parallels to the one of his birth.

Hunted by Disruptor agents, travelling and hiding, it was five years before Luther was tracked down, contacted and recruited by ZeroZero in the person of Rose Wylde, Valhalla Nova's Field Operations section leader and a psychic with a strong Empathic Link with her other selves.

Arkwright soon became W.O.T.A.N.'s prime agent, spearheading the fight against his former masters. In 1981 he obtained information from a dying Disruptor Knight he'd shot in a duel; FireFrost was hidden in the great pyramid of Cheops on parallel 00-72-87.... and the Disruptors were going in to get it.

Shunting to 00-72-87 and teaming up with Octobriana, a Mongolian warrior-woman and indigenous ZeroZero agent, Arkwright followed the Disruptor strike force, the black armoured super-soldiers, into the pyramid through the laser drilled tunnel they had made. Once inside, Arkwright used his psychic ability to locate FireFrost before the Rooks. The two halves of the 'The Fire Opal of Set' were anchored to the floor, in the grip of two giant stone sphinx, and the legend the ancient Egyptians has assimilated into their mythology told in relief carvings about the walls of the chamber. Using psychometry, Arkwright wrenched out the residual data stored in the psychic radiation emanating from the device. In a trance-like state his mind was flooded with imagery and information revealing the true origin and nature of FireFrost.



He saw war — lasting centuries between two vast star systems spanning light years and many parallel continua. War in space and on land; huge armies of genetically engineered troops, massive war machines and whole worlds destroyed. He saw FireFrost, secretly constructed by the highest scientists of a psychic humanoid race, on one parallel only. Powered by psionic energy — the binding force of the multiverse — this ultimate deterrent was designed to disrupt the atomic structure of the cosmic blueprint.

Inevitably it was activated; the two halves, once placed together, could not be separated, and the **disruption spiral** began. Working in geometric progression, this device accelerated entropy across all the parallels. At first only random, relatively minor effects were apparent; increased nightmares, illness, suicide rate and strange phenomena, such as showers of organic matter and speaking in tongues, were manifest. As the cycle progressed, the results of unrestrained chaos were of greater effect and incidence. Before long,

planets were subject to hurricanes, tidal waves, earthquakes, firestorms and, eventually, complete destruction. Solar systems broke down into component matter as the galaxy collapsed in on itself to become a black hole. And, its purpose fulfilled, immune from natural laws, FireFrost was spewed forth from the celestial grave of its mother galaxy to drift for eons through the emptiness of intergalactic space.

Arkwright saw the apocalypse device, after an unimaginable stretch of time, entering our galaxy and being drawn into the gravitational pull of prehistoric Earth to splash down in the primordial soup. He saw FireFrost split into its original halves as it sank into the depths; there to await through the passing millennia, as land masses rose and fell and Earth's contours were formed, embedded in limestone until its discovery by the excavations of the pyramid builders and its concealment in the Great Pyramid.

With Luther within a psychometric trance, Disruptor shock troops arrived. Outnumbered, Octobriana shouldered the semi-conscious Arkwright, made to

retreat, but was overcome by the Rooks. Fortunately the Rooks, being in effect human automatons, had no knowledge of who Arkwright and Octobriana were or they would have killed them. When they regained consciousness the soldiers were gone. So was FireFrost.

Now; present day; W.O.T.A.N.'s meticulous monitoring of the continua, its logic circuits and probability matrix has produced incontrovertible evidence of an event too horrific to be contemplated; FireFrost has been activated. Although at the moment its symptoms are too random or slight to be perceived as a whole psionic disease, we are now locked in the primary stages of an inexorable disruption spiral, accelerating in mathematical progression towards an inevitable doomsday. Everything will be destroyed — presumably including the Disruptors.

If you can now make your way into the briefing chamber, Field Operations Section Leader Rose Wylde will issue you with your directives.

GOOD MORNING,
VALKYRIE TEAM BETA.

I'LL WASTE NO TIME.

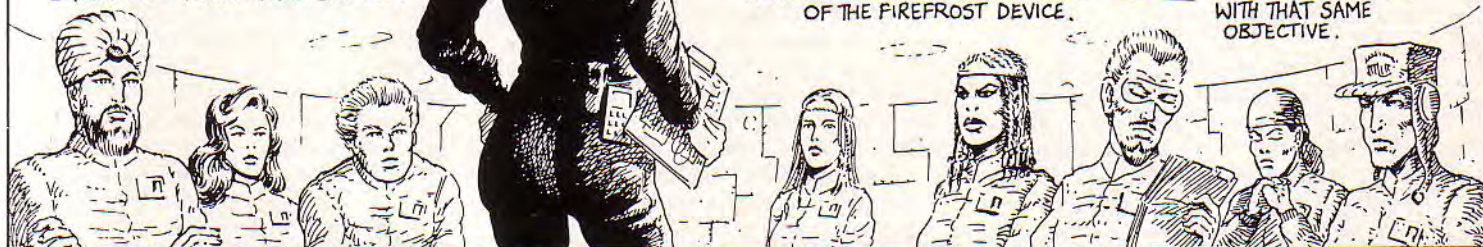
YOU'VE ALL READ THE BACKGROUND
BRIEF AND KNOW THE
CURRENT SITUATION...



WOTAN HAS HYPOTHESISED A
STRATEGY—THE RAGNAROK
EQUATION—AND IT INCLUDES YOU.

ARKWRIGHT IS PRESENTLY ENGAGED
IN A PRIORITY-ONE MISSION...
ATTEMPTING TO FIND THE LOCATION
OF THE FIREFROST DEVICE.

YOU ARE ONE OF
TEN BACK-UP TEAMS
WITH THAT SAME
OBJECTIVE.



YOUR SPECIFIC TARGET IS A HIGH-
-RANKING DISRUPTOR KNIGHT, ONE
SIMON MONKTON AKA LAWRENCE
BASKERVILLE AKA. FATHER NATHAN.

MALE CAUCASIAN, ABOUT SIX FOOT AND
168 POUNDS, BALDING, BROWN HAIR
WITH GREY AT TEMPLES, DARK BROWN
EYES, USUALLY BEARDED.

I'M AFRAID WE HAVE NO VISUALS.



OUR ESPIONAGE NETWORK
AND WOTAN'S PROBABILITY
MATRIX PROJECTIONS LEAD US
TO BELIEVE THAT MONKTON IS
IN POSSESSION OF INFORMATION
DETAILING THE CONTINUUM OF
FIREFROST'S LOCATION...

...YOU NEED TO OBTAIN
THAT INFORMATION.



IT WILL BE STORED ON HIS PERSON IN
SOME FORM SUITABLE FOR COMPUTER
RETRIEVAL. IT COULD BE ON CREDIT
CARDS... A MICRODOT... A HOLLOW
TOOTH — STUFF LIKE THAT.



WE DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS AT
PRESENT, BUT WE DO HAVE A LIST OF
HIS INDIGENOUS AGENTS ON FIVE PARALLELS.

THIS IS A LIVE HOLDVIEW
OF A PROTOTYPE TRANS-
-PARALLEL VEHICLE...
"THE VAN" AS THE
TECHNOS CALL IT.

YOU WILL BE THOROUGHLY BRIEFED
ON THE OPERATION AND FUNCTIONS OF
THE T.R.V. AND GIVEN DETAILED DESCRIPTION
OF ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR MISSION BY THE
GUIDANCE MATRIX AFTER THIS
BRIEFING.

REFER TO SHEET THREE OF YOUR
PRINTOUTS FOR A LIST OF
THESE AGENTS AND THEIR
CONTINUA.

00-56-19: British Empire Variation. Pawn: James
Fox-Talbot, the Photographer Royal.
Address: 3 Britannia House, Covent
Garden, London

00-66-74: Post Urban Collapse. Pawn: 'Snorty'
Hargreaves, dealer in medical drugs/
supplies. Whereabouts: last known
contact in the ruins of London

03-02-47: Japanese Empire Variation. Pawn: Ono
no Komachi, Geisha to the Emperor.
Location: Private house on an island in
the ornamental lake of Nhamaskha
Palace, Japan, the Imperial Residence

01-23-48: European Community Variation. Pawn:
Capt Thomas J Fitzpatrick, Irish arms
dealer. Location: Ulster

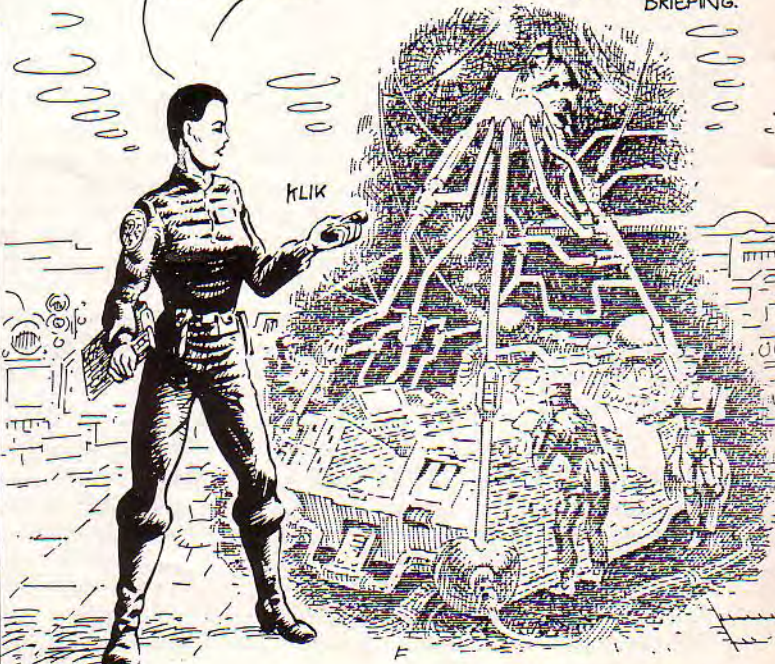
01-73-11: Catholic Empire. Pawn: Father Keith
Fleming. Location: St Mary's Church,
Preston, Britannia

ZeroZero agents will be available to render assistance
on all but the second parallel.

"ONE OR MORE OF THESE PAWNS
SHOULD KNOW WHERE HE IS."

BUT HOW DO WE REACH
THESE SUBJECTS?

GOOD QUESTION,
TEAM LEADER.



HMMM...

YOU MAY POSSIBLY
RUN INTO THESE...

KLIK

DALTON
PRESERVE US!

THE DISRUPTORS ONLY USE THESE "ROOKS"
IN EMERGENCY OR SPECIAL SITUATIONS
— THEY TEND TO PREFER LESS OVERT
WAYS OF MANIPULATING EVENTS.

AGAIN, THE G.M. WILL FILL YOU IN
ON DETAILS, BUT IT IS WORTH NOTING
HERE THAT THEIR HELMETS ACT AS
SHIELDS AGAINST PSI ATTACK.

YOU WON'T HAVE MUCH TIME.

FOR US TO STAND A CHANCE IT IS IMPERATIVE
THAT YOU FIND AND RELAY THE INFORMATION
BEFORE THE DISRUPTION SPIRAL REACHES
75% ENTROPY EFFECT.

WOTAN'S PROJECTION IS THAT
THIS WILL OCCUR IN 13 DAYS.

TO SAY THAT THIS IS A
TOUGH ASSIGNMENT IS
A LUDICROUS UNDER-
STATEMENT.

YOU WILL NEED YOUR WITS
ABOUT YOU AT ALL TIMES.

SOME OF YOU MAY
NOT RETURN.

THE G.M. AWAITS

GOOD LUCK.
YOU'LL NEED IT.

OUR THOUGHTS GO
WITH YOU...

YOU OK, ROSE?

UH? KARL?
YEAH. TIRED.

NIGHTMARES
AGAIN LAST NIGHT.

METOO.
PRIMARY FIRE-
FROST EFFECTS...

AND RAGNAROK.
Y'KNOW THESE TEAMS.

I'M NOT USED TO
SENDING PEOPLE ON
SUICIDE MISSIONS...

... EVEN IF THEY ARE
PART OF WOTAN'S
DISTRACTION STRATEGY
TO TAKE THE HEAT OFF
LUTHER.

IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION...

... THEY DO HAVE A 5.32% CHANCE
OF SUCCEEDING.

AND IF LUTHER
FAILS...

THEY'RE THE ONLY
CHANCE WE'VE GOT.

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THE FIRE OPAL OF SET

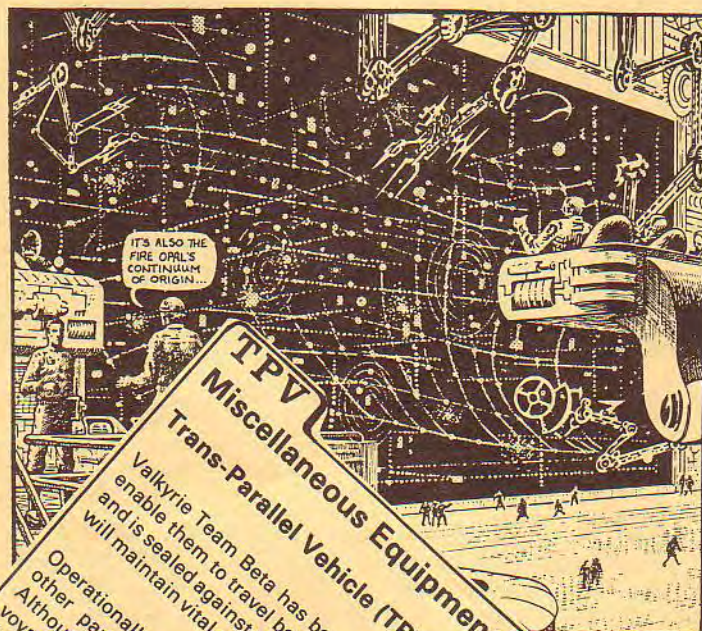
by Bryan Talbot & James Brunton
development by IMAGINE™ magazine

Notes for the Games Master

In running this adventure the Games Master (GM) will need Traveller Books 1-3 (or their equivalent), Book 4 **Mercenary** and Supplement 4 **Citizens of the Imperium**. Supplement 1 **1001 Characters** will be a useful but not essential aid. You should also read Bryan Talbot's article on p16 of this magazine, and the briefing for players on p18. Notes for players more familiar with the STAR FRONTIERS® system are on p28.

The adventure is concerned with the search by a team of characters — **Valkyrie Team Beta** — to discover the whereabouts of the Fire Opal of Set/FireFrost. This information is currently held by a Disruptor Knight named Monkton, so the team are expected to find him by visiting his agents (called 'Pawns') on five different parallels. However, after the third encounter the team should have the information to proceed to a confrontation with Monkton himself.

Read the whole of the module before play starts to get the overall feel. The adventure is unconventional — several linked *Amber Zone* encounters — and some general information is provided in boxed sections. Specific information is given in the adventure key. Players should be given the Players's Data on all five parallels that they are intended to visit when they ask for it (even though the team will not get to two of them). The Player's Data for *The Maze* section should be given to them only when the team is re-routed.



TPV Miscellaneous Equipment Trans-Parallel Vehicle (TPV)

Valkyrie Team Beta has been given an experimental prototype TPV to enable them to travel between parallels. The machine has eight seats, and is sealed against the external environment. The life-support system will maintain vital services for the occupants for no more than 48 hours.

Operationally, the TPV's computer (a Model 1) is preprogrammed to visit other parallels. In a set sequence after departure from ZeroZero, through a character with *Computer-2 Skill*, and a psionic with *Clairvoyance* (hooked into the computer) are required to guide the machine, and a character with *Medical-1 Skill* must monitor the Clairvoyant. The TPV must recharge its capacitors from its own internal power source for 24 hours before it can make another hop, although it is equipped with small wheels and can be pushed across level, reasonably smooth surfaces by characters with a combined strength of 35 or more.

Built into the TPV is an automedic — a simple minded medical robot that can carry out basic medical procedures with a skill level of 0.

The TPV carries the following equipment: 10 filter masks, 2 artificial gills, 8 short range communicators, 4 inertial locators, 2 hand computers (which may be linked to the vehicle computer), 4 pairs of binoculars, 10 electric torches, 2 mechanical tool sets, 2 medical kits, 2 electronic tool kits, 10 daggers and 8 vibro beamers.

The TPV can recharge the vibro-beamers in the standard time.

Also carried are Vladak's lock-picking equipment, 18 grenades for Mycroft's Mini-RAM Grenade Launcher (six of each type), a Hokusai painting to act as bait for Ono no Komachi (Monkton's agent on the third parallel that the team will visit), and a suit of cloth armour for each member of the team — to be worn as the circumstances dictate.

TPC Miscellaneous Equipment Trans-Parallel Communicator (TPC)

This is a fixed installation which allows contact between parallels in the manner of a videophone. An operator can program the TPC to contact any other TPC on any other parallel (throw 4+ to succeed, no DMs) providing the address of the receiving machine is known. A TPC cannot communicate with a TPC on the same parallel.

The device can also be used as a 'psionic white-noise generator' broadcasting a blanket of psychic waves that will reduce the psionic strength of any character within 100m by 3. The psionic character who is affected will be aware of such a reduction, its cause, and its source.

Character Roster

This section contains the details of all the major characters who are not tied to a particular location in the adventure. These characters fall into two groups — the player characters of **Valkyrie Team Beta**, and the Disruptor Knight and Rooks.

The characters are given in standard **Traveller** format, except that an **X** as part of the **Universal Personality Profile (UPP)** indicates that the characteristic is variable or inapplicable. New (or re-defined) skills are explained at the end of the section.

Valkyrie Team Beta — The Characters

Team Leader: **Orlando Bridgeman**

UPP **CAB99X**

Wheeled Vehicle-1, Survival-1, Admin-1, Vibro-beamer†-1, Dagger-1, Brawling-1.

Languages Spoken:
English, German, Spanish.

Bridgeman has an extensive knowledge (ie the GM should supply the player with details) of British Empire Variations on differing parallels.



Medic: **Persephone McPherson**

UPP **687CBX**

Medical-3, Computer-1, Electronics-1, Bribery-1.
Languages Spoken:
English.

Any psi-drugs administered by Persephone may (on a throw of 8+) not cause any disadvantageous reaction at the end of their period of effect — such as an overdose or a loss of Psionic strength.



Weapons Specialist: **Bernadette Dylan**

UPP **9CC77X**

Wheeled Vehicle-1, Fixed Wing Aircraft-1, Mechanical-1, Sword-1, Bow Combat††-2, Dagger-1, Bayonet-1, Unarmed Combat†-1, Vibro-beamer†-1, Gun Combat††-1.
Languages Spoken:
English, French.

Bernadette is a trained weapon specialist, and as such receives positive DMs for her skill when using any weapon that falls within one of the generic categories marked ††. The GM may decide if she receives any DM accruing due to advantageous Dexterity or Strength.



Native Liaison: **Vladek Kasyatkin**

UPP **9EB87X**

Wheeled Vehicle-1, Streetwise-2, Brawling-2, Vibro-beamer†-1.
Languages Spoken:
English, Russian.

Vladek is a specialist in locks and computer security systems. When Vladek attempts a task relating to such items he is considered to possess *Computer-2, Mechanical-2 and Electronics-2 Skills*.



Weapons Specialist/Native Liaison: **Izumo Kusabgi** UPP **9EB77X**

Wheeled Vehicle-1, Sword-3, Vibro-beamer†-2, Unarmed Combat†-2.
Languages Spoken:
English, Japanese.

Izumo is a specialist on Japanese art on different parallels.



Native Liaison: **Boston Singh**

UPP **F8F66X**

Wheeled Vehicle-1, Streetwise-1, Shotgun-2, Brawling-3, Revolver-1.
Languages Spoken:
English, Urdu, Punjabi.

Boston has a steel skull cap beneath his turban that is treated as a 'horns' attack in combat — with the full DM benefit of Boston's brawling skill.



Computers/Electronics: **Mycroft von Neuman**

UPP **7A8DDX**

Demolitions-2, Computer-2, Electronics-2, Mechanical-1, RAM Grenade Launcher-1.
Languages Spoken:
English, German.

Mycroft's grenade launcher is a special model, and he is not skilled in the use of standard grenade launchers. See the **Equipment Section** for full details.



Psionic: **Alice Whittle**

UPP **6B7DBX**

Telepathy-10, Telekinesis-10, Clairvoyance-9.
Psionic Strength 10
Languages Spoken:
English, Gaelic.

Alice carries her psi-drug supply with her at all times — initially 24 doses of Booster, 18 doses of Double and 4 doses of Special.



† **New Skills:** Added to the other types of Gun Combat skills that are allowed, Vibro-beamer is the ability to use that weapon. Full details of the Vibro-beamer are given in the **Weapons Section**.

Unarmed Combat is the equivalent of **Brawling-n+2**, where n is the level of **Unarmed Combat Skill**. A character with **Unarmed Combat -2** or better may make 2 attacks per round without positive DMs due to skill.

Disruptors

Disruptor Knight: **Monkton**

UPP **BCDCCX**

Unarmed Combat -2, *Admin*-1, *Computer*-2, *Electronics*-1, *Medical*-1, *Shotgun*-2, *Dagger*-1, *Telepathy*-9, *Psionic Strength* 9

Disruptor Rooks: **Leaders**

Normal Rooks

UPP **F8FXXX**

UPP **F6FXXX**

Laser Pistol -1.

Disruptor Rooks are of two varieties — leaders and normal Rooks, usually organised into teams of four normal Rooks under the guidance of a leader. Leaders can freely transfer between teams, but normal Rooks cannot be re-assigned (eg two teams of two normal Rooks cannot be consolidated into one team of four).

Both types of Rooks are armoured (the equivalent of combat armour) and, although they have a Strength of 15 for purposes of determining combat DMs, it is treated as 10 for the purposes of taking wounds.

Rooks are armed with laser pistols. These are treated as laser carbines in respect of the defender's armour and dexterity DMs, and as automatic pistols when considering range. They inflict 3D wounds on a successful hit and have a magazine capacity of 20 shots. Normal Rooks suffer a DM of -2 when firing at a new target — even if they have fired at the target before, and then engaged another target. Subsequent shots do not suffer this penalty.

Leader Rooks may 'register' a target for themselves and the normal Rooks under their guidance. A successful throw to hit is required (no damage is done). Thereafter, the leader and his team may fire at the registered target with a DM of +2, provided that the leader hits each combat round. Once the leader misses, the registration process must be carried out again to obtain the positive DM.

Monkton has a TPC (see the **Equipment Section**) implanted in his skull, to automatically notify his masters of his death. A squad of Disruptor rooks will then be sent to destroy his base on Parallel 00-73-87.

Monkton's TPV

In many ways functionally identical to the Valkyrie Team Beta vehicle, Monkton's TPV is a much more sophisticated model. It still requires a clairvoyant to guide it, but does not require medical attention or a computer specialist. The destination can be programmed by the pilot (throw 7+ to avoid an error, resulting in arrival on a random parallel — DMs +1 for every level of *Computer Skill*, +2 if Education is 9+). There is a drawback — the TPV can only carry two people with hand luggage.

Monkton's shotgun shells

Monkton has coated the pellets of his shotgun shells with a powerful nerve poison. Anyone wounded by one of these shells may (throw 7+ to avoid, DMs +1 for every point of Endurance 9+) die in one combat round; otherwise the character will suffer violent seizures and die within three combat rounds unless given medical attention (throw 10+ to avoid death, DMs +1 if Endurance 10+, +1 per level of skill over *Medical*-2).

1. The Photographer Royal

Players' Data

Parallel 00-56-19 British Empire Variation.

Never having lost her American colonies, Great Britain has always been in a strong position on this parallel. World War I — the Great War — was a Disruptor engineered plot. Victorious due to Disruptor aid, a strong Britain thereafter dominated the Continent and strengthened its colonial hold upon the world at large. This is a parallel on which ZeroZero has little influence, and Disruptor control is strong.

On this parallel, Monkton's Disruptor Pawn is James Fox-Talbot, the Photographer Royal. His address is 3 Britannia House, Covent Garden.

Games Master's Information

The GM may find access to a copy of a London A-Z or similar will be helpful in running this section of the adventure.

The TPV will arrive in an empty warehouse off Nine Elms Lane. Secured two days previously by ZeroZero agents native to this parallel, it contains a fully fueled car (a common 4 seat hatchback model which will not attract attention). On the back seat of the car are three suitcases containing a complete 'native' outfit for each member of the team. In the glove compartment of the car are the warehouse keys, a map of London with Britannia House and the warehouse marked on it, and money sufficient to the team's needs (the equivalent of Cr.1000).

The flavour of this London is distinctly Victorian, but with a level of technology (TL) equal to that of the 1970s (TL7). The police are comparable with the Metropolitan Police of the real world. Social standing is still accorded importance — the clothes provided for the team are those of the wealthy upper class, save for Bernadette, Boston and Vladek, where Imperial prejudice and arrogance will cause them to be treated as lower middle class. Most officials tend to deal with foreigners shortly and sharply.

Orlando will, on a throw of 7+, be able to provide specific information on this parallel — traffic laws, customs, social organisation (ie the GM will supply the player with such information).

The simplest course of action is for the team to drive across London to Fox-Talbot's residence. Throw 7+ to avoid an encounter with the police, failure indicating that some infraction of social standards has occurred — drawing unwelcome attention to the team. Every two hours while driving throw 6+ (9+ on the first such roll, due to unfamiliarity with the parallel's traffic regulations) to avoid some type of mishap, DM +1 per level of the driver's *Wheeled Vehicle Skill*. If this fails, the results are:

1: Car wrecked — all occupants take 3D damage. A passerby will call the police to the scene.

2: Car damaged — the car is mobile, but no longer legally roadworthy. The occupants take 2D damage due to the accident, and the police will again be called.

3-5: A minor brush with another car, damaging a bumper or wing. The other driver(s) involved will call the police unless bribed (throw 8+ to succeed, DM +2 per level of *Bribery Skill*) or intimidated (throw 7+ to succeed, DMs +1 if Strength 8+, +3 if Strength 12+).

6: A near miss with another car. The police will be called on a roll of 6+ by the other driver(s) unless dealt with as above.

Fox-Talbot is dead, executed by his Disruptor masters. His body was found hanging under Lambeth Bridge in the early hours of yesterday morning and the news fills the headlines, even on television and radio news programmes.

News stands are covered in bill-boards announcing the 'Murder of the Photographer Royal'. However, such stands are not part of ZeroZero society, so unless the team specify that they are looking for one (they will pass several on their journey) they will not notice the news.

Anyone buying a newspaper — perhaps to see if Fox-Talbot is mentioned in the Court Circular — will certainly learn of his death. The press, while full of the story, contains little hard information — found by Constable Trench at 6.30am.... identified by Pauline, his sister.... two men dressed in black wanted for questioning. The equipment in the TPV may be used to receive radio and TV transmissions, but no fresh information will be gained.

As the car is not large enough for the whole team, they may decide to hire a taxi-cab (this London has no Underground system). The cabbie will inform his passengers (on a throw of 10+) of Fox-Talbot's death in the course of his gossip. The GM should actually act out the chatter — adding additional conversation, about horse racing, television programmes and the like. If an inattentive group misses it they will waste a great deal of time on this parallel.

At Britannia House the team will find uniformed policemen at the front and back doors. Across the street a gaggle of pressmen, cameras much in evidence, are waiting for the police detectives (an inspector and five constables) to emerge with Fox-Talbot's private papers. The team will be refused entry — and if they ask to see Fox-Talbot they will be told of his death. The press will be only too willing to talk — in graphic and mostly erroneous detail — about the man and his demise.

The team should be encouraged to realize that there is nothing to be achieved by remaining on the parallel longer than is necessary to recharge the TPV's capacitors.

2. The Penicillin Man

Players' Data

00-66-74 Post Urban Collapse

After a drawn out Second World War, lack of co-operation between the victorious Allies, and the apathy of the vanquished, brought about a slow climb from economic ruin. America gained control of the Middle Eastern oil producing countries — and was on the road to recovery — when the Russian Revolutionary State declared war to 'liberate' the oil nations. Drawn into the Oil War which lasted until 1959, Europe expected aid and an oil share from America when the oil states were divide between the two main aggressors, but received neither. Rioting, anarchy and the collapse of centralized government followed.

Europe has been a wasteland for the last ten years. The remaining population returned to a primitive feudal system, content to serve the Petrol Barons in return for protection from roving bandit gangs. The extent of Disruptor influence on this parallel is unclear.

Monkton's Pawn on this parallel is 'Snorty' Hargreaves, a dealer in drugs and medical supplies. Last reported location: the ruins of London.

Games Master's Information

Again, access to a copy of a London A-Z or similar is useful in running this section of the adventure, although the GM should remember that most of the city is in ruins. The cover picture (of the ruins of Tower Bridge) on this issue of IMAGINE magazine gives an impression of this London — and should be viewed as an aid in visualizing the scene.

The TPV will arrive with a jolt in the dry bed of the River Thames.

During the Oil War, Europe was devastated by chemical weapons. South east England was affected and London lies on the fringe of this area. It is now sparsely inhabited by the survivors of the war — and scavengers who have come down from the North.

The chemical agents — strains of tabon, sarin, soman, arsine and VX — linger on. Throw 8+ each hour (DM +1 per level of *Medical Skill*) to realize that filter masks should be worn and that the atmosphere should be tested. If characters leave the TPV without taking precautions, throw 10+ per hour or fall ill (DM +1 if Endurance 11+). The first symptoms (shortness of breath, trembling — subtract 1D from Strength and Dexterity) will appear after 3 hours plus 15 minutes per point of Endurance. Death will then occur 1D hours later unless a throw of 8+ is made (DM +2 per level of *Medical Skill*). After immediate care the affected character must return to the TPV for continuous care and monitoring by the Auto-Medic. Throw 13+ every two hours to recover (DM +1 cumulative after each four hours of care).

Testing the atmosphere and preparing prophylactic shots — for use in conjunction with filter masks — will take a character with *Medical Skill* four hours. Throw 4+ for each team member for these shots to be effective.

Encounter 1: After climbing out of the dry river bed — regardless of which bank — the team will be attacked by a pack of 30 rabid dogs. The dogs will appear from a ruined building some 250m away, and reach the team in waves of 8, 6, 9 and finally 7 dogs.

30 dogs (chaser/carnivores): Weight 30kg; Hits 9/8; Armour None; Weapons Teeth; Reactions A2 F9 S3. Rabies will be contracted from any wound. Throw 6+ to avoid death (DM +2 per level of *Medical Skill*).

Encounter 2: The noise of the team fighting the dogs will attract a group of militia from one of London's three Petrol Baron stockades. This group of 10 men (average UPP **894854**, *Shotgun-1*, *Blade-1*) is armed with shotguns (each has 1D+7 cartridges) and blades. They will assume that the team are mercenaries, and try to hire them for protection duties at their settlement — Tomstown — located in the ruins of the Kennington Oval. Even if the team refuse the contract, they will be invited back to the village for trade and drink. The scavengers mean no harm, their offer is an honest one — hopefully the team will have some new stories to tell, medical supplies or mechanical or electrical knowledge to trade.

Should the team refuse the offer to go to Tomstown they may wander London at will. Those encountered will be lone scavengers who will avoid contact with the team — and who know nothing anyway. Eventually the team will encounter either another group of 'militia' who will make a similar offer to the first, or arrive at one of the stockades.

Tomstown is the largest of the pallisaded villages/stockades. The others — Fort Windy and Shalve's Palace — are located in St John's Wood and

Fulham. All three are dirty collections of lean-to hovels and rebuilt ruins surrounded by high barricades. Two or three hundred people dwell in each — and half this population requires some form of medical aid. Petrol generators provide a meagre power supply. At each village a militia of 40-60 men, armed with shotguns, rifles and revolvers (all short of ammunition) provide protection and scavenging teams.

The inhabitants of each village have heard of Hargreaves, and several hours of questioning will eventually (throw 9+ each hour, DM +1 per level of *Streetwise* or *Bribery Skill*) find someone who knows his present whereabouts — Casablanca in North Africa — and the fact that he is not expected to return for a year.

The hopelessness of trying to follow him in the time available should be obvious to the team, and again they should be encouraged to leave this parallel as soon as the TPV is ready.

3. Cha-no-yu on a Dark Afternoon

Players' Data

03-02-47 Japanese Empire Variation

Contact and trade with the Portuguese had a remarkable effect on Japan on this parallel. The potential of firearms and Western nautical skills was swiftly learned by the Shogunate. China was invaded and subdued after a century of intermittent, bloody conflict. In the West, the Catholic Church was strong, its influence retarding scientific advancement. Japan had accepted Catholicism, though in 1879 — under Disruptor influence — it returned to its old faith by Imperial decree. The inevitable war between the Japanese and Catholic Empires ended in 1902, and the Japanese Emperor took the title Lord of All the World. The war had seen fantastic advances in Japanese science and industry, again thought to be Disruptor influenced. These advances have continued through to the 1980s.

Industry is now centred in Europe, Russia and America. Although surrounded by Imperial troops, Japan and China have become two vast gardens, where the Japanese — First Class Citizens all — enjoy the fruits of their conquests. Europeans have been designated Third Class Citizens — an improvement on their former status as slaves — since the Humane Reforms of 1943. Indians and Africans, together with some Arabs, are Second Class Citizenry.

In this Japanese World, Monkton's pawn is Ono no Komachi, the Emperor's Geisha. Ono lives in regal luxury in a private house set on an island in the ornamental lake of Nhamaskha Palace, the Imperial residence.

Games Master's Information

The TPV will arrive in the cellar in London held by a small group of ZeroZero agents, led by Amanda Lewis, a railway labourer. The team will be provided with identification — as Izumo Kusabgi, dealer in Fine Art, and his personal retinue. Bernadette and Boston will be classified as secretaries; other members of the team as servants and bodyguards. An aircraft (which will be waiting at London Airport), and associated documentation, will be provided for the 14-hour flight to Japan, along with sufficient money to maintain Izumo's facade — the equivalent of Cr. 10,000. A facsimile of the Hokusai painting is aboard the plane.

Any Imperial Police involvement with a Third Class Citizen unaccompanied by his superiors will result in automatic detention, unless proof of legal purpose and identity can be produced. In Japan itself, no Third Class Citizen may appear unaccompanied in a public place, no matter what the reason.

The team should be told all of the above, and that the Emperor is not in residence at the Nhamaskha Palace, so it is open for guided tours. Ono no Komachi is in residence.

38 miles from Yokohama City, the Palace is set on an artificial hill next to the Imperial Communications Centre (ICC) — the only normal public access route to the Palace. The flawless gardens are open to the public, and visitors are unescorted, but cameras and patrols make it certain that anyone leaving the marked paths will be swiftly apprehended. The Palace buildings (except the Geisha's house) are also open to visitors — except Third Class Citizens — in escorted groups who are issued ID badges at the ICC Reception Centre.

The lake is purely ornamental, filled by a pumping station beneath the ICC, and quite deep enough for the skiffs which are on it. The bridges are made of wood, supported by stone piers, and the one to the Geisha's island has an electrified gate. It is watched by cameras set at both ends.

A computer-controlled subway runs from the ICC sub-cellar station to the palace buildings — with a branch line to the Geisha's island. The main line back to Yokohama has a service road running beside it. Carriages are routed to the Geisha's island by select officials and her personal retinue — or by computer command. This command can come from any ICC terminal (throw 9+ to defeat the computer's security systems, DM +1 per level of *Computer Skill*). Access to ICC terminals is normally denied to non-Japanese.

Descending from the hilltop, an access road is provided for wheeled vehicles. A gatehouse with a permanent detachment of 15 police officers prevents unauthorised entry. Anyone arriving at the gate without adequate identification and purpose will be detained.

Security is very intense. About 300 police (armed with a variety of swords, automatic pistols, rifles and SMGs) are responsible for patrolling the palace grounds, its buildings and the ICC. Camera surveillance of all main corridors, each subway station and all public areas is maintained.

Surrounded by a wall surmounted by electrified wire, Ono no Komachi's island is not ICC's responsibility. Security is handled by the Geisha's six personal guards. Security cameras watch the gardens, the lake, the bridge, the subway station lift and stairs. One guard will be in the Security Room at all times — except during the interview detailed below. This guard will also have access to the arms locker in which there are four additional sub-machine guns, two revolvers, ammunition for all the firearms in the house, and three swords. The other guards will be spread throughout the house, as will a variety of other staff (maids, cooks and a helicopter pilot), or in the garden.

The small central lagoon has a low jetty with a pair of four-man skiffs tied to it. The helicopter on the landing pad is capable of carrying eight, including the pilot. Bernadette may attempt to fly it (throw 5+ to avoid an accident, with a DM of -3).

Gunfire on the island will not attract attention — the guards often have target practice — but explosions (from Mycroft's launcher) will. The helicopter does not require any clearance to take off, and anyone using the skiffs will not be challenged if they land near a marked path.

Despite the security around her, Ono no Komachi's weakness as a collector of rare Japanese art will provide the team with access to her. Her private collection is reckoned to be second only to that of the Emperor. To exploit this weakness, the team has a Hokusai painting that was never painted on this parallel. If the team opt for this method of contact, the facsimile and a letter of introduction can be handed to ICC officials or be posted to her. ICC will bring it to Ono's attention that day, and an interview will be arranged for the following afternoon. If posted it will take an extra day before an interview is arranged.

Ono — thanks to her Disruptor contacts — will recognize the painting as extra-parallel in origin. She will immediately contact Monkton using the TPC in her house, and he will order her to capture at least two of the team, and eliminate the rest.

On the afternoon of the interview, all her staff, except the guards, will be sent to the main Palace. The guards will be stationed in rooms around the main lounge, where Ono will meet Izumo in his persona as an art dealer. Izumo and his accompanying retinue will be escorted to the house by a regular ICC official and two policemen from the ICC building. As specified in the **Equipment Section**, the TPC will be set to generate psychic 'white noise'.

Ono will be disguised as her own maid (any character specifically examining her must throw 8+ to see through this disguise, DM +1 if Education 10+, or +2 if Izumo). After the ICC personnel have departed, she will ask the team to wait for 'her mistress' and offer tea to all the members of the team — at this point astute players may realize that something is wrong given the nature of this Japanese society.

The tea is drugged (throw 9+ or fall unconscious in two combat rounds -30 seconds — plus five seconds per point of Endurance, DM +1 if Endurance 10+). When the first victim passes out, Ono will draw an automatic pistol from her clothing and call for the guards. She will then order the team to surrender — an order they do not have to obey. Anyone drugged will be kept sedated until Monkton returns to this parallel if the Geisha and her guards win. The rest will be killed. The team will have failed.

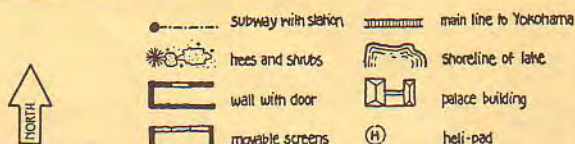
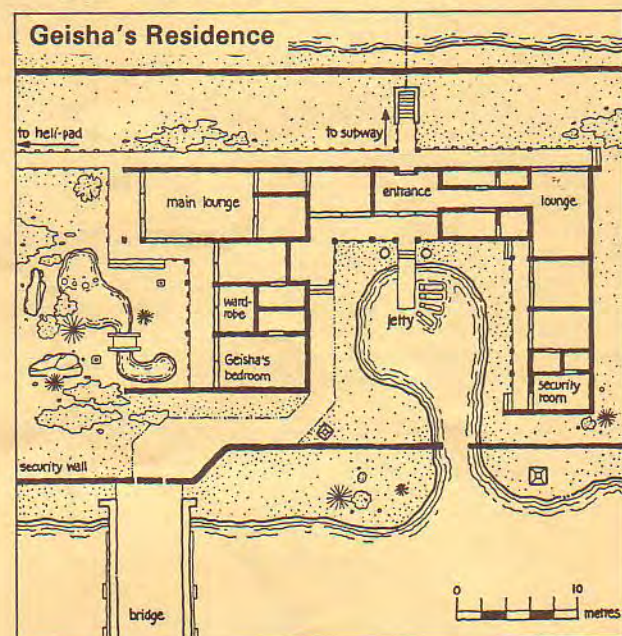
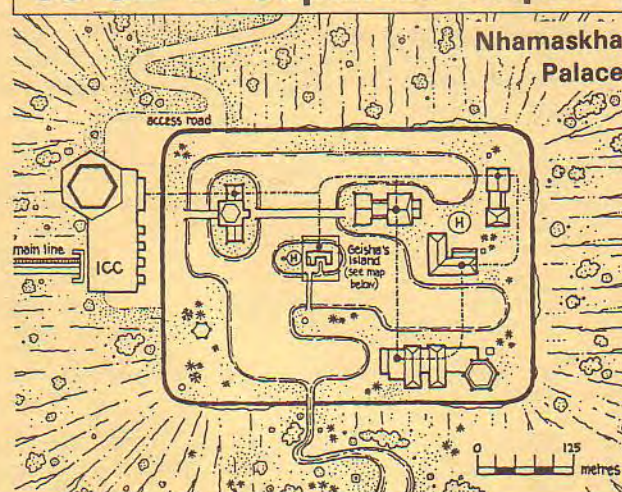
Ono no Komachi

UPP 7C6BAB

Admin-1, Bribery-1, Computer-2, Medical-1, Wheeled Vehicle-1, Unarmed Combat-1, Sword-1, Automatic Pistol-2.
Languages spoken: Japanese

IMAGINE magazine, May 1984

03-02-47 Japanese Empire



Six Guards

Average UPP 7A8768

Revolver-1, SMG-1, Unarmed Combat-2.

All are armed with a submachine gun and a revolver.

Ono's TPC is hidden in her wardrobe area and booby trapped (throw 9+ to notice this, DM +1 per level of *Computer* or *Electronics Skill* and 10+ to disarm the booby trap, DMs +1 per level of *Computer Skill*, +1 if Dexterity 8+, +3 if Vladak is attempting to do so). If the TPC is used without the trap being detected and disarmed, a small atomic device located under the house will be detonated by radio signal, killing everyone within a one mile radius.

The TPC is set to communicate with Parallel 00-73-87: London. This, and any data about Monkton the team can extract from Ono are the only clues they should normally be given about the Disruptor Knight's whereabouts. If the players are really stuck at this point, the GM can allow a character to find a religious broadsheet from St Paul's Cathedral on 00-73-87. If this hint fails the GM should tell the team that Monkton's name is pencilled on it.

The team will be able to use this TPC to contact ZeroZero. From here, or a London terminal that the ZeroZero agents operate, the team will receive the reprogramming needed to take their TPV to 00-73-87, a picture of Harry Fairfax (a ZeroZero agent), and how to find him at the Hilton Tavern in 'the Maze'.

The Other Parallels

And had the Valkyrie Team Beta mission gone as intended...

The fourth and fifth parallels pre-programmed into the TPV should not be visited by the team at all. However, the following information is available to the players and should be given to them in a similar fashion to the Players' Data on the first three parallels.

01-23-48 EEC/British Empire Variation

Germany, her recovery and re-unification aided after the 'Second World War' by the Disruptors, is the dominant power within the European Economic Community. Still the major world colonial power, Great Britain is being undermined by Germany through massive support in terms of cash aid to Republican elements within Ireland — all carefully channelled through North American Irish organisations.

ZeroZero has a large influence on this parallel, and WOTAN agents can expect little aid.

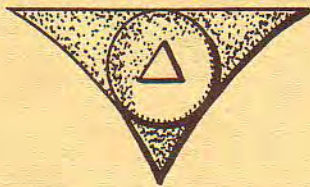
Monkton's Pawn on 01-23-48 is, as might be expected, heavily involved in the Irish situation. 'Captain' Thomas J Fitzpatrick is an armaments procurer and, although his last address is known to be defunct, he is still believed to be in Ulster.

00-73-11 Catholic Empire Variation

Rising to true European dominance in the late 16th century, Rome under the New Caesars achieved an artistic and military renaissance. By the end of the 17th Century this had changed to a tyranny that the Holy Roman Church deposed in 1822.

The Catholic Church proved, however, to be a sterner master than any of the New Caesars. Its first acts weakened and — finally — removed the nobility. This policy of 'all men equal under God' was supported by the peasantry — and some of the nobility who readily surrendered their lands in exchange for Church positions. 160 years of world theocracy have been the result, with science reserved by and for the Church — few of the benefits ever reach the common people.

Monkton's Pawn is Father Keith Fleming, the parish priest at St Mary's Church, Preston in Brittania (Northern England).



The Entropy Effect

The physical and psychic manifestations of the FireFrost Activation will become more and more noticeable as time passes in the adventure. As specified in the Briefing, the team must find the location of FireFrost and return with the information before the Entropy Effect reaches an unacceptable — and irreversible — level.

In game terms the Entropy Effect will reach this point after 13 days. Up to that point there is a finite chance that some effect of FireFrost will manifest itself on the same parallel as the Valkyrie Team Beta.

There are three types of manifestation which will affect the team: TPV malfunction, strange 'happenings' and psychic disturbances. The GM should roll once per day for each type of effect on the following table to see whether that effect occurs, and then see the appropriate notes for the nature of the Entropy Effect.

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Throw	12+	11+	10+	9+	9+	8+	8+	7+	7+	6+	6+	5+

If an effect is indicated the GM should decide at what time of the day it occurs.

TPV malfunction: A malfunction in one of the TPV's systems will occur. A DM of -5 is applied to the initial throw. A roll of 9+ must be made to repair the throw in 8 hours, DMs +1 per level of *Electronics* and *Computer Skill* applied, -1 if a second Entropy Effect roll indicates another effect.

Psychic Disturbances: Any non-Disruptor psionically talented character will lose 1D-3 psionic strength points.

4. The Maze

Players' Data

00-73-87 Puritan Protectorate Variation

The Protectorate of the Cromwells — controlled by the Disruptors — is now facing action by Royalist forces, backed in turn by ZeroZero. Strict curfews and executions of suspected Royalist terrorists are only two of the policies of General Standish and the Supreme Puritan Guard.

These policies are not — indeed could not be — imposed on the area within the London Wall known as 'the Maze'. It is a vast no-go area where all the misfits and undesirables in the Protectorate — mainly the London mob of cut-throats, beggars, wastrels, rakes, pimps, prostitutes and artists — and the Royalist rebels live. The Maze is the only place where taverns, theatres, brothels — and Roman Catholic churches — can be found.

Games Master's Information

The TPV will arrive (amid a thunderclap) eight kilometres west of London, some fifty metres north of the Thames — and six metres above ground level. The explosive arrival and resulting fall will render characters unconscious unless a throw of Endurance or less on 2D is made. On landing, a huge rock pierces the hull and embeds itself in the central generator.

The computer will indicate that the TPV will implode within 5-8 minutes — it will actually happen in 6 minutes (24 combat rounds) and anyone or anything in the TPV will be destroyed. It takes 6 combat rounds for two people to carry an unconscious character clear (18 combat rounds for one person). Removing weaponry and other equipment takes 1 combat round for small items (ie items which can be roughly defined as a 'handful' — vibrobeamers, binoculars, filter masks etc). Larger items such as medical kits, suits of cloth armour, Mycroft's grenade launcher, take 2 rounds to remove.

The TPV has arrived in a pasture. From the position of the sun it appears to be late afternoon. A short distance downstream is a wooden jetty with a rowing boat (big enough for ten people) moored to it — and a small farmhouse is visible about 200m away. It is deserted.

Taking the boat is the only available method of reaching Fairfax quickly. It will take three hours to reach London and as it will be dark by this time, the team will be breaking curfew. This is no great hazard until the boat reaches the Tower of London. At this point the river is swept by searchlights from the Tower (throw 5+ to avoid the beams), and if the boat is spotted a machine gun will open fire — without any real intent to hit. Two motorized launches will intercept the boat if it is still illuminated by the searchlights (throw 10+ to move the boat out of the light). Each

Strange 'happenings': The GM should roll once on the following table. DMs: -1 on Days 1, 2 or 3; +1 on days 10, 11 or 12.

0: An NPC approaches the party and informs them he is in possession of an atom bomb (or similar), and would they like to see it. The NPC is, of course, certifiably insane.

1: A sudden fall of hailstones appears out of a clear blue sky. Roll 4+ to avoid injury (1D-3 wounds). Many of the hailstones are red in colour.

2: Unseasonable weather — the GM should determine what are the most unlikely weather conditions for the parallel.

3: A rain of frogs, fish, mice or snails occurs. The GM should determine whether this causes damage or danger to the team.

4: Aurora Borealis display — radios and other short-range communicators become inoperable. On a throw of 9+ any computer will malfunction.

5: Earth Tremor — any character who does not throw 7+ will be thrown to the ground and take 1D wounds. Buildings will suffer minor superficial damage.

6: The pull of gravity is increased or decreased by 10% for one hour. At the end of that period gravity returns to normal.

7: Spontaneous Human Combustion — an NPC within sight of the players will burst into flames and be reduced to a small pile of ash within two combat rounds. The player characters will be unable to help.

Weapons

Vibro-beamer (1400 grams; TL 12): The basic weapon of ZeroZero agents, the vibro-beamer fires a burst of concentrated ultrasonic sound that shakes the target to pieces. The weapon is the same size and general shape as an automatic pistol with a fitted silencer — 300mm in total length. The integral magazine capacity is 20 shots, and this can be recharged from a suitable power source in 10 minutes (40 combat rounds).



Mini-RAM Grenade Launcher (4500 grams loaded; TL9): Similar in appearance, size and weight to a shotgun with a folding stock, this 20mm grenade launcher fires one shot for each pull of the trigger. A six round magazine is inserted under the barrel, and the grenade load may be tailored to suit the user's requirements — eg flechette, flechette, HE, HE, HEAP, flechette. Magazines are 350mm long and 25mm in diameter and weigh 750 grams (individual grenades weigh 125 grams). A sling is provided to assist carrying, although von Neuman normally carries his in a carpetbag.

Weapons Matrix

Attacker's Weapon	Defender's Armour							Defender's Range					Wound Inflicted	Dexterity Requirements					
	Nothing	Jack	Mesh	Cloth	Reflec	Ablat	Combat	Close	Short	Med	Long	V Long		Req Lvl	Dex	DM	Advn Lvl	Dex	DM
Vibro-beamer	+4	+4	+2	+1	+4	+4	-2	0	+3	+1	-1	no	4D	7	-2	10	+2		
Mini-RAM Grenade Launcher														8	-3	11	+1		
HE	+4	+4	+2	+1	+4	+4	-3	no	no	+2	+1	-6	5D						
Flechette	+6	+6	+2	-3	+6	+3	-7	no	no	+2	+1	-6	2D						
HEAP	+2	+2	+1	+2	+2	+2	-1	no	no	+1	0	-5	5D						

boat is manned by five men armed with shotguns. If the team is captured it will be held indefinitely in the Tower of London, awaiting execution. The GM should determine the chances of escape before the original 13-day ZeroZero time limit expires.

Once past the Tower it will be easy to dock under London Bridge and enter the Maze — roughly the same area as the financial centre of London today. The Maze is similar to the slum areas of the 15th Century (this London never had a Great Fire), and is in a very dilapidated condition. The streets are little better than open sewers, overhung by the upper storeys of buildings. Street gangs roam at will, bullying the inhabitants for landlords, pimps and pleasure. However, the growing Royalist presence (and uncertainty as to its future) mean that most 'neutral' Maze dwellers are keeping out of sight and trouble.

Harry Fairfax is waiting in the Hilton Tavern, a genial den. When approached he will leave his game of dice and lead the players to the snug.

Fairfax will give them directions to a room Monkton has rented over a small drapers on Threadneedle Street. The room is used for meetings of the 'St Paul's Theatre Group' and occasionally as a place to sleep. If he is not in his room, Monkton could be anywhere. Most of the people who try to follow him fail or end up dead. Fairfax does not know whether Monkton has a permanent base or where it might be.

Monkton always carries a shotgun — and never misses with it. Fairfax knows of two cases where men died at Monkton's hands — both were big men, and had survived shotgun wounds before. Fairfax suspects that Monkton has tampered with the gun — or that he is a sorcerer. Beyond this Fairfax will be unable to help them.

Fairfax was being watched by three of Monkton's men, who will leave to tell their master that the team has arrived (if Monkton was warned by Ono no Komachi) or that Fairfax has met people of obviously extra-parallel origin.

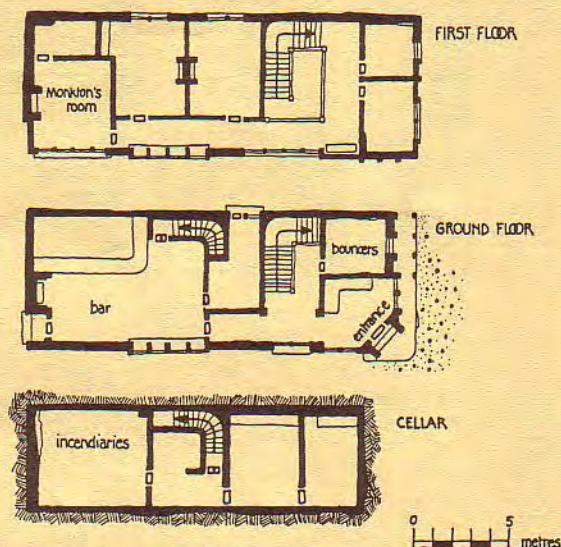
Monkton will immediately leave his room in Threadneedle Street and go to the Merry Jackdaw — a 'gentleman's club' on the corner of Cheapside and Bread Street. He will order two men to remove all evidence of his presence — and then lose themselves.

When the team arrive the room will be locked and unoccupied. The owner of the draper's shop, John Haselrig, was disturbed by the sounds of Monkton's hurried departure and got up to complain. Brushed aside by Monkton's men, he still wants to complain to someone. While moaning about 'stage players' and their lack of consideration for others, he will tell the team that they have gone. He will let the team into the room on a throw of 8+ (DM +1 per level of *Bribery Skill*, +1 if Strength 9+), and on another throw of 4+ (same DMs) he will mention that one of the men said that he 'wished he could go to the Merry Jack.... as well'.

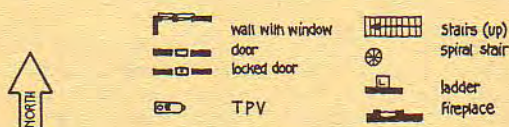
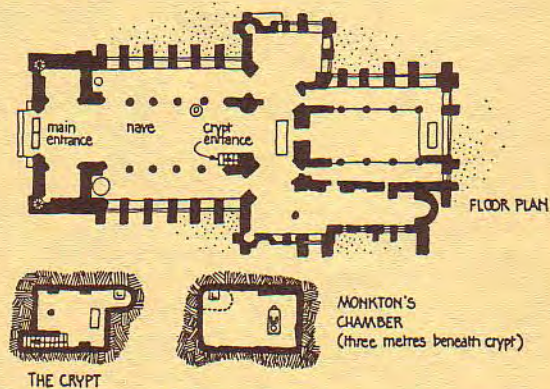
The room contains a bed, a table, three chairs and a wardrobe. A search will reveal three shotgun cartridges (modified as described in the **Disruptors**) and a religious broadsheet from St Paul's Cathedral. Anyone examining the cartridges may notice the tampering (throw 7+, DMs +1 per level of *Shotgun Skill*). A character with *Medical Skill* (and a medical kit) will be able to synthesize prophylactic shots for the nerve poison on a throw of 8+ (DM +1 per level of *Medical Skill*).

00-73-87 The Maze

The Merry Jackdaw



St Paul's



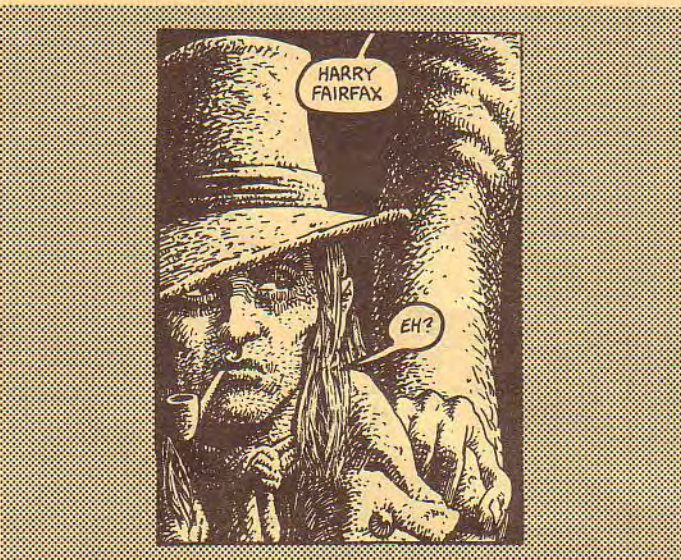
KEY

Questioning Maze-dwellers may (throw 6+, DM +1 per level of *Streetwise Skill*, repeat the throw every five minutes) reveal that the 'Merry Jack' is probably the Merry Jackdaw, and where it is located.

The Merry Jackdaw Gentleman's Club is staffed by three barmen (average UPP **778622**, *Brawling-1*, *Shotgun-1*), two of whom spend their time playing cards in the back room; and five girls. A single shotgun is kept beneath the bar. Apart from Monkton and the employees, there are three 'gentlemen' being entertained in the bar.

Nobody (other than Monkton) knows that the Merry Jackdaw is also a huge incendiary mine, to be exploded (like others at strategic locations in the Maze) when the Royalist rising starts, starting a Fire of London. The door to the cellar, and the incendiaries, is locked — and the staff do not have the key.

As the team enter the barman will greet them in a friendly fashion, although he will realize that they are not here to avail themselves of the Jackdaw's facilities. He will tell them which room Monkton is in — as he is more than certain that Monkton can look after himself — and will



The STAR FRONTIERS® Game

Although the STAR FRONTIERS® and Traveller games might seem very similar, there are deep-rooted differences. This section is intended to be a guide — and that is all it can be — for GMs who want to run the *Fire Opal of Set* as a STAR FRONTIERS module.

Characters in Traveller are defined by Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Intelligence, Education and Social Standing on a scale of 1-15 for each Characteristic. These are written down in a shorthand form called the Universal Personality Profile (UPP) in the order above, and in hexadecimal numbers (0-9 mean exactly that, A = 10, B = 11, C = 12 etc). While none of these Characteristics conforms exactly to Abilities, as a rough guide 1 point of a Traveller Characteristic equals $6\frac{2}{3}$ points in a corresponding Ability in the STAR FRONTIERS game.

Skills in the two games are used very differently. In the module various mentions of 'throw 7+...' occur, with 'DM +1 per...' immediately afterwards. The '7+' part is the number (or more) that must be thrown on 2d6 for something to happen (or not happen!). Traveller uses only 6-sided dice. The 'DM' in this case stands for 'Die Modifier' — a number added to or subtracted from the dice throw. In most cases look at the context in which the skill is being used and then try to find the closest subskill in the STAR FRONTIERS rules. Note that some skills (Admin, Streetwise, Wheeled Vehicle etc) have no direct counterparts at all.

Equipment is, in many ways, the easiest section to deal with. Look at descriptions and choose the nearest equivalent from the existing equipment lists. For example, the vibro-beamer can be seen as a pistol-sized Sonic Disruptor, with a maximum range of 50m or so.

Psionics are a problem. Until the official rules appear (if they ever do), a 'psionic' character in the STAR FRONTIERS game should make an Ability Check based on the average of Stamina and Intuition, to see if the psionic activity succeeds — but guard against letting psionic characters do anything by willpower alone!

Above all, go for the correct 'feel' and don't worry too much about the numbers — after all, it is supposed to be fun!

casually mention that 'John has his shotgun'. He will also warn the team not to include the other customers or any of his girls in their private quarrels.

Monkton (see the **Disruptors**) arrived alone lugging a heavy carpetbag, and went upstairs with a girl. He has drugged her and will use her body as a shield (treat as the equivalent of Mesh) while he lies, stripped to the waist, in the bed. Under the bedclothes is his shotgun, and between his feet is a grenade with a four minute fuse. The pin has been taken out, but the lever is held in place by Monkton's feet. Monkton believes the fight will be over (one way or another) in four minutes — the grenade is his way of striking back from the grave.

His normally brown eyes have been turned startlingly bright blue by a pair of contact lenses. The location of FireFrost — which the team has been seeking — is encoded upon the right contact lens.

Monkton's carpetbag contains spare shells for his shotgun, a medical kit, a set of priest's robes and a set of large keys for the crypt beneath St Paul's — the faded tag has the word 'Crypt' upon it.

On Monkton's death his TPC 'bleeper' will summon a squad of Rooks to destroy his TPC and TPV — stored in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral. The team should have realised that Monkton's TPV or TPC represent their only hope of contacting ZeroZero and passing the location of FireFrost to WOTAN. They should also have sufficient clues to the location of Monkton's equipment — the robes, religious broadsheets and keyring.

As an extra hindrance to the party, Monkton's grenade or a panic below during any fighting (or some such contrivance by the GM) will cause the Merry Jackdaw to catch fire. 60 combat rounds later (15 minutes) the incendiary mine below it will detonate, causing a latter-day Fire of London. If the team still have not realized that they should be heading for the Cathedral, descriptions of the Fire's spread — preternaturally aided by the Entropy Effect — and panic stricken Maze-dwellers heading towards the only obvious point of safety — the Cathedral — should guide them in the right direction.

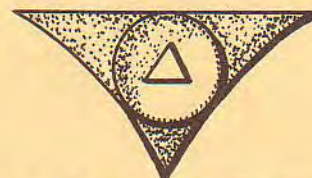
The Cathedral is untouched by the fire, and crowded with worshippers seeking salvation from the fire. As the team reach the main entrance the Rooks (two teams — see the **Disruptors**) summoned by Monkton's implant will appear on the steps, surrounded by a pyramid constructed of tubular black material that has an oily sheen to it. The near-mindless Rooks will dismantle their TPV (usable only by them), clipping the sections to their armour. During this time, the native Londoners will be panicking — as their appeals to God seem to have resulted in the appearance of these demonic beings.

The Rooks will enter the Cathedral after clearing the steps and entrance by firing randomly into the crowd. Both teams will proceed down the Nave, firing down the central aisle to move the crowd, to the crypt entrance. One team will take up station here and continue to fire at the crowd, the other team will descend the steps to secure the crypt area.

Once the crypt is secured — or if resisted — the group at the top of the stairs will descend into the crypt and from there into Monkton's chamber, cut into the foundations with a laser. Once there, the surviving Rooks, once opposition is dealt with, will surround Monkton's TPV and TPC and detonate their internal self-destruct devices, effectively destroying their objective. Any character in the chamber when this happens will take 12D in damage.

The Rooks will only attack team members if they attack first or enter the crypt. In both cases, the leaders will attempt to 'register' their team's fire. The random firing by the Rooks to panic the crowd will not affect the team members if they remain calm and under cover.

If the team can prevent the Rooks from destroying Monkton's TPV and/or TPC they will have no trouble in contacting ZeroZero and passing the location of FireFrost to WOTAN.



Credits

Original concept and plot: Bryan Talbot and James Brunton
Development: Mike Brunton (no relation), Jim Bambra and Paul Cockburn

Art: Bryan Talbot
Cartography: Paul Ruiz

BEATLES



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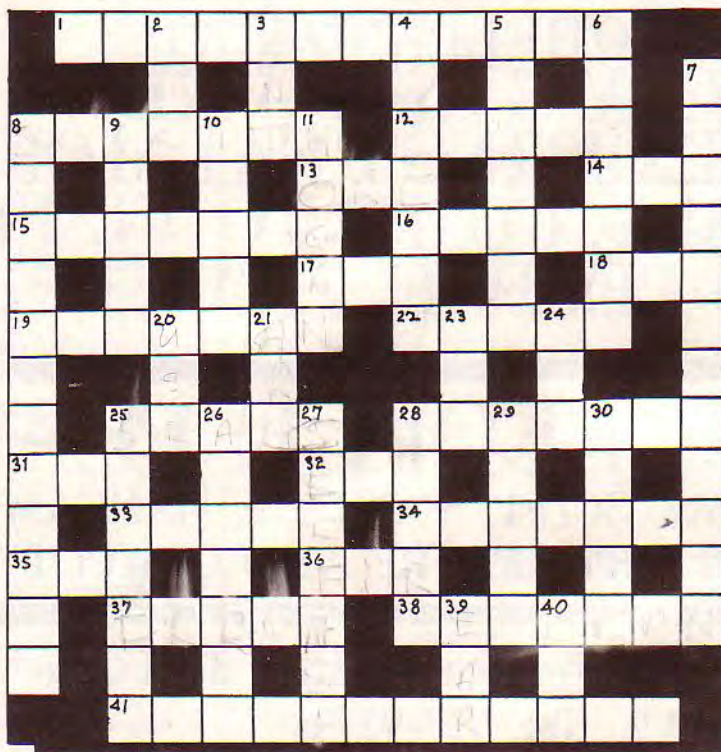
HOLBORN 202 High Holborn, London WC1V 7BD 01 405 6285/8592
FINCHLEY 21/23 Ballards Lane, Finchley Central, London N31XP 01 349 2257
LEWISHAM 210 Lewisham High Street, London SE13 6JP 01 852 0449
***SOUTHGATE** 10 The Broadway, Southgate, London N14 6PN 01 886 4258
WOOD GREEN 104/106 High Road, Wood Green, London N22 6HE 01 888 0937
BIRMINGHAM 26 South Mail, Bham Shopping Centre, B2 4XD 021 643 8604
BLACKPOOL 19 Hounds Hill Centre, Victoria Street, FY1 4HU 0253 26461

BRIGHTON 4/8 Dyke Road, BN1 3FE 0273 776626
BRISTOL 17/19 Penn Street, BS1 3AW 0272 20259
CARDIFF Northgate House, Kingsway, CF1 4AD 0222 397645
CROYDON 135A North End, CRO1 1TN 01 688 1585
KINGSTON 30/32 Eden Street, KT1 1EP 01 549 5464
LEEDS 16/18 King Charles Street, LS1 6LT 0532 456611
LIVERPOOL 36/37 Dawson Way, St. John's Centre, L11 1JJ 051 709 0799

MANCHESTER 4/6 Brown Street, off Market St. M2 1EE 061 834 0279
NEWCASTLE 43/47 Pilgrim Street, NE1 6QE 0632 324161
NOTTINGHAM 3 Mount Street, NG1 6JW 0602 411693
ROMFORD 7/11 High Street, RM1 1JU 0708 24783
SHEFFIELD 38 Pinstone Street, S12HN 0742 77864
SOUTHAMPTON 114 East Street, SO1 1HD 0703 24843
WATFORD 70 The Parade, High Street, WD17 2AW 0923 27563

*MAIL ORDERS TO SOUTHGATE

P CROSSWORD I Z E



CLUES

Across

1. Dig up a big number for an old game (4,1,7)
8. High above the trenches flies the camel (7)
12. Ray is different in Turkey (5)
13. Iron or Copper (3)
14. Cockney Boss (3)
15. Small ink? — That's an idea (7)
16. Silly escape without much point when war's over (5)
17. You have them in games — in the past (3)
18. River shortened to nothing (3)
19. Sauron's little buddy (7)
22. Train your dog for an exam? (2,3)
25. They run down your trousers! (5)
28. Atari & Co set up near Serbia (7)
31. Most of the army in the vehicle (3)

32. Every editor's main asset (3)
33. Strange game after nothing for greek letter (5)
34. I'd help a strange pub name (7)
35. NATO area without the Tee (3)
36. Evergreen tree (3)
37. The original En Garde star (5)
38. Amber fluid container (4,3)
41. Formula One improved on for a fast lap (5,7)

Down

2. Novel three points (3)
3. Adam the worker (3)
4. Poker playing hippy's greatest fear? (4,3)
5. How editors buy stationary (2,5)
6. I spy with my little eye ...er...no-one (2,5)
7. The game that separates man and beast (12)

WIN a copy of Bryan Talbot's book 'The Adventures of Luther Arkwright' or TSR's 'Bloodstone Pass', AD&D™ miniature board wargames rules, when you solve this crossword by Paul Simpkins.

Entries to reach IMAGINE magazine by June 1st, 1984. The first six correct answers out of the hat will each win a copy of one of the books. Don't forget to tell us your name, address and age.

Name

Address

Age

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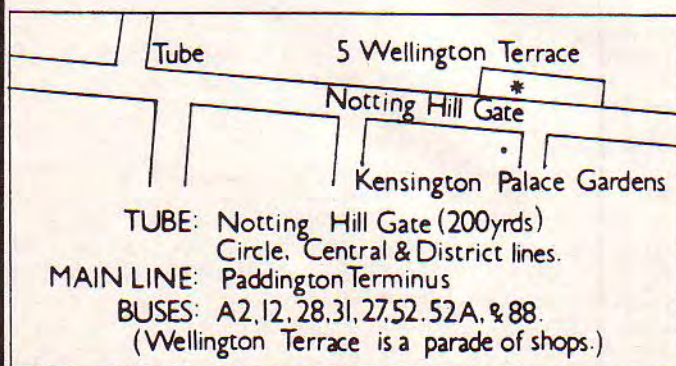
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D&D® PLAYERS ASSOCIATION NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER
OF THE BRITISH
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®
PLAYERS ASSOCIATION



TURNBULL TALKING

Answers to Turnbull Talking Puzzle part 1

As many of you remarked — yes, this first bit was pretty easy, and we had bunches of correct and very-near-correct answers. Thanks to you also for various side comments, like the ingenious person who suggested that, since the symbol for 0 (zero) rather resembles an archway, the face of the pillar bearing that symbol is a good spot to search for an entrance. There were also a number of suggestions, derived from the principles, about the nature (alignment behaviour) of the cult and its members; and I was amused by Harry Embery who, in closing his letter, said 'Hope this the grade makes' in the true spirit of the answers; and by Jorek whose roller skates were no substitute for a **haste** spell.

Anyway, even when I had been really pernickety, there were still 17 answers

which were perfect, so in the time-honoured manner I got my trusty d20, decided to ignore 18, 19 and 20, and rolled...

...and congratulations to the winner **JANET TOWNSEND of Bettws, Gwent**, who receives a copy of 16 — **Ravenloft**.

Consolations (but no prizes — sorry!) to John Barnes, Richard Develyn, G Devey, Harry Embery, Alan Jones (nice to hear from Queensland), Jorek, Graham Lee, Kevin Lord, Julian Murgatroyd, T Olliver, M Probert, Matt Quartermain, S Sayers, Simon Tatler, Russell Turner and Alan Veale.

I won't print the correct answer this time, because it might help you solve part 3 (issue 13)! **Don Turnbull**

CLUBS & CONTACTS

New this month we have notices from people who would like to find or found RPG clubs, as well as announcements from those that already exist. To use either free service, just drop us a line.

First, S Lawson wants to start a club in **Southampton**, for players of the D&D® game. There are lots of suggestions for making the club more than just a games-playing session. To know more, write to **Club Ref 1401**, IMAGINE magazine.

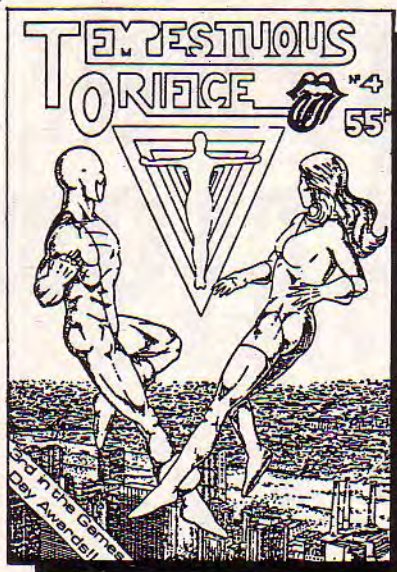
Novice David Pearson wrote to us for advice on finding gamers within reasonable travelling distance of his home in **Stoke Golding, Warwickshire**. Contact David at **Club Ref 1402** — though we can't help unless David sends his full address!

Bobby Brown of **Scotstoun, Glasgow** is another who is short of people to play the D&D game with; **Club Ref 1403** if you're interested in getting in touch.

A new games club has just been formed in **Wrexham, Clwyd**. Its 25 members meet fortnightly at the Library Arts Centre, Wrexham. Wargamers and RPG-ers welcome — RuneQuest, Traveller and the AD&D game played at present; they're willing to try others. Contact Craig Cartmell on tel: 0978 264068.

The South Dorset Military Society, formed in **Poole, Dorset** in 1974, is still going strong. One thing they do is to produce a newsletter, the 10th anniversary edition of which should be on sale to the general public around now. For more details write to **Club Ref 1404**.

Finally, there is the Hack and Slay Society in **Folkstone, Kent**, where 16 members play Advanced, RuneQuest, Traveller and Warhammer every Sunday 2-5pm. They would like to encourage new members: write to Mr A Coombs, 78 Holland Avenue, Folkstone, Kent.



More of the potential candidates to take over the 'best fanzine' tag from **Dragonlords** arrived last month. **SEWARS 17** shows a 'zine following the 'hardware' route to popularity, with a mini-adventure, random weather tables, new magic items, spells, etc. It also carries an increasing number and variety of reviews. Its track record is such that it must be considered to be the 'leader' at the moment.... but what with tactical voting and competition from other 'hardware' zines, well, who knows. Chris is talking about improving the physical quality of the zine, and this must help.

But if you want me to stick my neck out, here's my tip for the Best Fanzine of '84. **Tempestuous Orifice 4** carries articles on Heraldry Colleges and the Moral Majority; two scenarios, one for **Call of Cthulhu**, one 'system-free'; plenty of reviews and some chat. It came 3rd at **Games Day** last year — perhaps some indication of its potential to live up to my prediction will come with the new **IMAGINE** magazine **GamesFair** poll in early April. More details next issue.

Two new 'zines have arrived. **Vacuous Grimoire 1** shows promise, although there are some horrendous empty pages. The scenario was quite good; there may be better things to come from this later. **The Storm Ruler 1** had the worst cover I've ever seen anywhere and precious little that was any better inside. If this is a chat zine, then let's hope it finds something to talk about — if it's a games zine, then let's hope the gaming material is better than this.

Crystal Ball 2 showed some improvement over the first issue, with a new character class, the Samurai, and various articles and ideas around the theme of castles. Duncan Harris told me just how much money CB lost on the first issue — it might prove a lot cheaper if he printed both sides of the paper....

Right, the monthly drift away from role-playing towards postal play begins with **Psychopath 12**. **En Garde**, **El Nabisco** and **Psychos(h)occer** get good coverage in here, and the layout shows distinctly professional touches.... Pete Tamlyn has the usual run of

scoops in the Hot Gossip section of **Acolyte 55**, along with a letters section that is threatening to get back to its former length. Nice to see the return of the 'regular' Baja column, in which Pete develops the milieu for his campaign. **Flame 2** arrived with a cover that looked like the ink was low in the duplicator, but this chat 'zine gets much better inside. It still has to develop its own identity, but then I'm sure someone, sometime, must have said something similar about **Acolyte**.

Walamaysia Gazette 40 (I think that's what this is — doesn't anybody put their name on the cover any more?) had some great cartoons. The cover has reminded me to tell you that we've just played a pre-production version of the **Marvel Super-Heroes** game, and I was Captain America. Love it. I'm also coming to love the idea of a game of **En Garde**, in which the chief idea seems to be to think up the corniest French name you can. Examples in **Cut & Thrust 21** and **22** were Patrick de Foie Gras, Mustaphe Krapp, Tuubela Bailse and Piste A'sa Neute.... **Take That You Fiend 17** had Pacamac, Drunquensot and Wall-carpetting.

I am under strict instructions from the management of **TSR UK** not to mention that Tom Kirby's United team, Swavesey Studs, have taken just 4 points from 16 games.... That should keep me out of trouble. This news came from **Hopscotch 39**, which I urge you to get hold of if you are interested in joining the nutty world of postal gaming. Another zine with a

DIALOG

A few weeks ago I had to chain Alter in the dungeon because he bit the postman. I used a combination lock, since I wasn't really mad at him, and he soon emerged. After all, he knows any combination I know. And I let him stay because the postman really deserved it for delivering after 6pm. Worse yet, the postman delivered a ratty-looking, taped envelope containing a letter from Paul Cockburn. It wasn't the letter from PC that was bad (of course?), it was the absence of three issues of **IMAGINE** magazine which he said were enclosed — lost by Post Awful.

When Alter came up, I told him about it. 'And here's another bit of news you'll enjoy. PC doesn't "pen" his letters any more.'

'You mean he types them himself like any honest writer?'

'No, he uses a microcassette recorder to dictate.'

'Pastafazoola! That's the only thing that could be worse than "penning". Remember those obviously-dictated letters we used to get from businessmen involved in gaming? They sounded — maybe I should say "read" — as though composed by a semi-literate. How can you effectively edit something you can't even see?'

'Perhaps they didn't edit them. But in the high-class business world, in the USA at least, it is customary to have someone type a rough draft from the dictation, revise that, then have it retyped.'

'Good grief, no wonder American business is losing ground. What a waste of time and effort. Do you think PC does that?'

'Well, **TSR USA** is infamous for its inefficient operation — we've experienced the delays and roundabouts and such — so maybe **TSR UK** picked up some bad methods? Then again, typists may be even cheaper to employ in Britain than here.'

Low Pulsipher offers another idiosyncratic look at the gaming world.

'You employ me cheaply enough. At least I never typed the drafts.'

'Yes, you don't know how good a master I really am.'

Alter soon went back to the dungeon, but he returned a few hours later, scratching his head. 'Hey Puls, why is it always the Assistant Editor of **IMAGINE** magazine that you hear from? Do they really have an Editor, or is he a *nom de plume* for Paul Cockburn?'

'I can't imagine why they'd do that.'

'Well, when he goes to conventions he can reply to complaints with "it's Keith Thomson's fault". His dummy character takes all the heat.'

'Have you been playing **Illuminati**, Alter? Not only is that too Byzantine for anyone but a **Diplomacy** player, people would catch on when "Thomson" kept finding excuses not to appear at conventions. I'm sure people in Britain must have met him.'

Alter and I used to play **Diplomacy** a lot, but I gave it up because I'm too Lawful to enjoy the more Chaotic events of a typical game, especially by post.

'Yeah, there are ways round that. Get a friend to impersonate "Thomson" for a day. Use a disguise. Just keep making excuses!'

'Forget it, Alter.'

'Well, I'm from Missouri — ' he began.

'No you're not. We've never been to Missouri.'

'C'mon Puls, it's just an expression. "Show me" is the State motto. And until we get a letter from the alleged K Thomson, I'll continue to believe he's a figment.'

'Figment of what?'

'Who knows?'

A few months ago I bought a **Kaypro II** computer for word processing and other 'business' functions (it has no graphics capability). Unfortunately, this doesn't help Alter much because he still has to retype piles of stuff I

drafted before we got the computer, and he also types papers for students, to pay for the thing!

Computing in general, and computer games secondarily, have taken up a lot of my time lately. I have a five-inch stack of games magazines and adventure modules to read, but every one of the four computer magazines I receive is read as soon as it arrives at Castle Puls. Fortunately, Alter is still a die-hard non-electronic gamer, and doesn't mind letting people know it.

'Too many video games are for dummies,' said Alter, 'and they're all solo, for "closet" gamers. Gaming is a social activity, not something to do alone.'

'But many people play wargames solitaire, and there are computer games that require some strategy and thought — they're not all like Atari VCS/2600 reaction-tests.'

'Well', Alter conceded, 'some of the non-arcade games I've seen aren't bad. Though those "adventures" are puzzles, not games. There's no player interaction in them, even between computer-player and human player, and once you find the right set of moves there's no point in playing further. Also, there's too much emphasis on graphics.'

'But however much we regret it — and I do — people seem to be more visually-orientated than cerebrally-orientated. You know what games publishers say, the attractive cover sells the game....'

'What bothers me most, Puls, is that the electronic games seem to be overwhelming the manual games. Computer gaming draws potential non-electronic gamers away from board-gaming and role-playing. People only have so much time and money to spend on leisure, and those who spend that time and money on computers can't spend it buying and playing the **D&D** game at all hours of the day and night. Computer games cost 30 or 40 dollars each. Buy a

variety of games is **Mad Policy 93**, which may even have a few openings left for a game of **Diplomacy**, if you hurry.

Lastly, membership of the **British Fantasy Society** and the **British Science Fiction Association** is recommended to those with a keen interest in either of these fields. They both sent through piles of literature last month, and I happened to notice that both mentioned artist Dave Carson as the winner of various awards run by the two associations. Dave was largely responsible for the art in #13 of this magazine. Everyone here would like to add their congratulations, and I'm sure the same is true for many of you too.

SEWARS, Chris Baylis, 12 The Fryth, Basildon, Essex (60p); **Tempestuous Orifice**, Patrick Fama, 15 York Close, Morden, Surrey (55p); **Vacuuous Grimoire**, Richard Roberts, 52 Whalesmead Rd, Bishopstoke, Hants SO5 6HL (50p); **Storm Ruler**, Matt Quartermain, 138 Three Bridges Rd, Three Bridges, Crawley, W Sussex RH10 1JP (?); **Crystal Ball**, Duncan Harris, 1 Greenfield Pk, Portishead, Bristol, Avon (25p); **Psychopath**, Mike Dean, 32 Newlands Ave, Scarborough, N Yorks YO12 6PS (40p); **Acolyte**, Pete Tamlyn, 2 Poplar Rd, The Coppice, Aylesbury, Bucks HP22 5BN (sub); **Flame**, Simon Billenness, Falkner/Eggington Courts, Loughborough Univ, Leics LE11 3HT (35p); **Walamalaysia Gazette**, Dave Thorby, 200 Lavender Hill, Enfield, Middx EN2 8NJ (7p + post); **Cut & Thrust**, Derek Wilson, 321 Headley Rd E, Woodley, Reading, Berks RG5 4SE (35p); **Take That You Fiend**, Kevin Warne, 48 Boscombe Ave, Hornchurch, Essex RM11 1JG (35p); **Hopscotch**, Alan Parr, 6 Longfield Gdns, Tring, Herts (25p + post); **Mad Policy**, Richard Walkerdine, 144 Stoughton Rd, Guildford, Surrey GU2 6PG (18p + postage); **British Science Fiction Association**, Sandy Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lanarkshire G72 9NA (£7 pa); **British Fantasy Society**, Jo Fletcher, 130 Park View, Wembley, Middx.

Zines Reviewed by Paul Cockburn



few of those, and how much do you have left for boardgames or role-playing games? Heck, already there are as many magazines about electronic games as about non-electronic games.'

'Computer games are easier to play, more immediate, don't require imagination or thought in many cases — what can you expect? Life goes to the lowest common denominator. But boardgamers used to say some of the same things about role-playing games, and boardgames are still going strong, though in the background.'

'I don't like it Puls. Maybe I'm just feeling old....'

'Remember, Alter, the same sort of person is attracted to gaming, and science fiction/fantasy, and to the more cerebral sorts of computer games. They tend to go together, and people seem to find time for all three. Maybe some of the computer gamers will get into role-playing.'

'Real role-playing, I hope you mean, not the so-called computerized role-playing.'

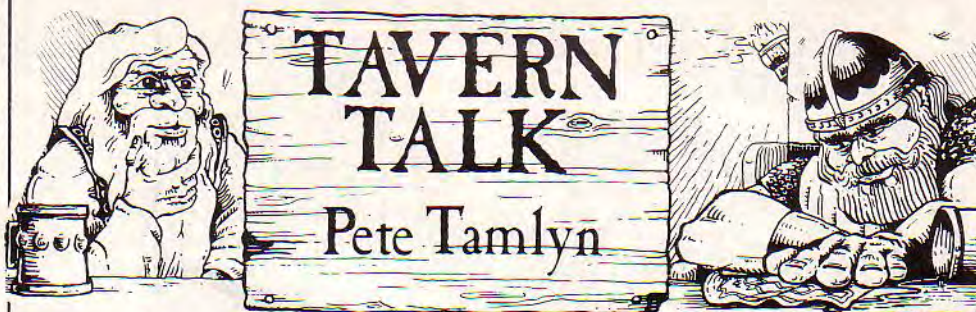
'Yes. But someday there may even be a computer role-playing game you'll like. Already in **Wizardry** you can have six characters, even if there's no interaction with NPCs other than combat. Perhaps the next generation will include significant role-playing, especially if the artificial intelligence people can be brought into it.'

'But it'll never match playing the game with other people. You can't have real role-playing without interaction among people.'

'Sure. Which reminds me, the next semi-annual 'invitational' D&D game is next weekend, so we have to get back to work.'

Lew Pulsipher

Lew is a frequent contributor to American role-playing magazines, including **DRAGON®** magazine and **Fantasy Gamer**.



Well, yet another outside broadcast special: this edition of *Tavern Talk* is coming to you live from an *Acolyte* printing weekend with guest stars Mike Lewis and Steve Norledge. Steve is here to learn how to operate a duplicator, having recently acquired one in partnership with several other London-based editors. Mike is here to experience 'back to the roots' fanzine production after his heady days of semi-professionalism. But wait, start at the beginning, Pete! And for the benefit of Doug Cowie who doesn't believe that I can do anything without a drink in my hand, we'll move to a tavern...

Ratmeat is an irregular London hobby-meet which was originally organised by Ian Marsh on the pretext of celebrating the Chinese New Year, but which turned into a sort of birthday party for Trev Mendham and Graham Staplehurst, and a wake for various fanzines. We had already heard that *Wyrms Claw* was to fold and this was generally regarded as a shame, it being a very good zine, though no great earth-shaking event as it normally held itself somewhat aloof from the rest of fandom. Then Dave Hulks arrived with the news that he was folding *Q&Q* which was, as they say, something of a shock. But when Ian Marsh announced that he was leaving *DragonLords* to start his own zine, well, what was Mike going to do?

You'll all know by now that *DL* has folded (though some of you may be like poor Trev Mendham who was given the news by Ian and Marc as a scoop for his gossip zine, *School for Scandal*, and didn't believe it!). It will, of course, be greatly missed, but Mike, Ian and Marc have no intention of disappearing from fandom and all three are likely to be running zines of their own soon. Mike says that he has already started getting 'how can you do this to me?' letters from distraught subscribers which is understandable, but it is the nature of amateur publications to be relatively transitory. *DL* lasted four years which is a goodly innings, but during that time its three editors grew apart both in terms of geographical location and in interests, making some sort of break inevitable. Let's just hope that other people will be inspired by *DL*'s example, and that we'll see other fanzines as good, or even better, grow up in the near future.

Meanwhile, back at *Ratmeat*, two people definitely not folding, so as to be 'alternative' to the general trend, were

Marc Gascoigne and Fergus O'Connor. Fergus politely informed me that he was going to beat me up in order to get his name into *Tavern Talk*, though he never actually got further than telling me what a lot of tough friends he had. I presume this must be some sort of 'alternative violence'.

One person not present at *Ratmeat* was 'David Stone' whose vitriolic letters have been upsetting the readers of certain RPG magazines of late. This is because Mr Stone is a well-known fan pseudonym, first invented by Paul Mason but since used by several other people. So who is it, then, that is writing them? My sources are hinting that it might be the editorial staff themselves!

I note that Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson have been most unfairly victimised in the latest *SEWARS*. Ian Marsh, who is, of course, not feuding with Chris Baylis, wrote a highly derogatory review of *SEWARS* in WD 50. Chris was understandably miffed and said so, but being keen to dispel the illusion that he might be feuding with anyone from *DragonLords*, he blamed it all on the big city mega-stars. Come off it, Chris: Ian and Steve have quite enough problems without you embroiling them in your personal vendettas.



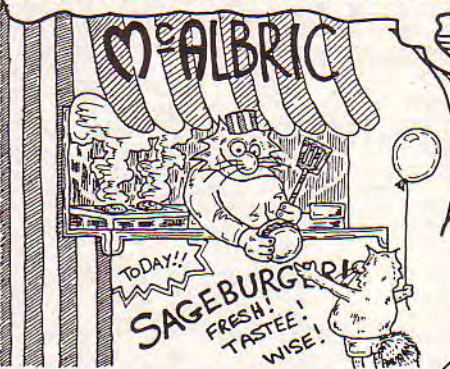
Now back to exposing pseudonyms. Who remembers the Dave Langford story in *IMAGINE™* magazine #12? Well, did you know that the nefarious Nivek is a real person who has been responsible for a far greater evil than destroying the universe? Yea, verily, for Nivek is none other than Kev Smith, the man who invented the game of *Finchley Central*. Langford, of course, writes all his friends into his books. Look out for his new novel which should be out soon.

Next issue, live from *GamesFair*.

Pete Tamlyn



WELCOME BACK TO
"SAGES SANS FRONTIERES"!
THE EXCITEMENT HERE IS
INTENSE NOW THAT THE
ELIMINATIONS ARE OVER!!



I HEAR THAT THERE'S BEEN A SLIGHT
MISHAP AT THE DIALECTICAL
EXERCISES, WHERE PHINEAS THE
SOPHIST HAS FAILED TO ARGUE HIS WAY
OUT OF A PAPER BAG!

BUT THE JUDGES
ARE STILL LOOKING FOR
HIM, AND WE'LL LET YOU
KNOW WHEN HE'S
BEEN FOUND!



NOW ~ IT'S OVER TO MAGNUS
AND THE PROPHECY FINALISTS!

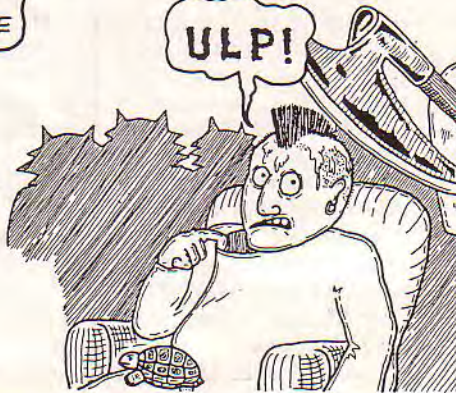
HOW WOULD YOU VALUE THE
PATRONAGE OF A GRAND
MASTER?

AND WHAT REMUNERATION
WILL YOU FIND
ACCEPTABLE?

YOUR LAST QUESTION IS IN TWO
PARTS, MASTER VATES —
THINK VERY CAREFULLY BEFORE
YOU ANSWER.



ULP!



AND SO IT CAME
TO PASS THAT A
PROPHET
LAUREATE
WAS CHOSEN
IN MOGGEDON
(THUS FAMINE
WAS AVERTED)

NEXT-CONSPIRACY!

THE SPARROWFALL

One day all the trees will be gone,
No flowers will grow wild and free,
And anyone who cares to look outside
Will see a barren wasteland - forgotten world.
I will not see that far off day,
But somebody will shed my tears
And wonder why they had to see
The sparrowfall.

GARFIELD MARK.



Letters



Insane Swords

In #12 of *IMAGINE™* magazine we published Chris Felton's *Enchantment for Beginners* about constructing magic items — including swords. This article expands the idea by considering the results of something going wrong...

Many magical swords in the AD&D™ game are intelligent — especially those with special powers. Yet there is no reason to assume that these weapons are any saner than people — they should have their own little quirks and idiosyncracies, or worse. Such weapons will give characters a change from the single-minded egoism of 'normal' magic swords, and raise additional problems and options for them.

Although most insane swords do more good than harm to the possessor (this rarely seems true at the time), some can contribute to an early, often embarrassing, death. They should be used carefully by the Dungeon Master, and not introduced into the campaign in great numbers.

An intelligent sword — or any intelligent weapon for that matter — can become insane through one of the following circumstances, or perhaps (for really unfortunate weapons) a combination of more than one:

1. Being made by an insane spell caster.
2. The maker being interrupted in the enchantment of an intelligent weapon. This can never be arranged in the hope of producing an insane weapon, but must be a genuine interruption.
3. The weapon being either dropped, struck or violently seized between its forging and its quenching.

4. Being quenched in a **potion of delusion**, a **philtre of love**, a similar potion that causes mental effects or an infusion of components taken from creatures which would generally be regarded as insane (eg banshee or nilbog blood).

5. Mild neurosis may be caused by the enchantment being finished on April 1st or during March or the weapon being quenched in an alcoholic beverage.

6. In the case of old weapons, being used against foes with a low Armour Class — causing the weapon to miss its target more than normal.

7. The long term owner of the weapon dying under traumatic circumstances where the weapon was powerless to prevent death occurring.

It is up to the DM to determine whether any of these conditions have been met by a particular weapon — and whether it suffers the ill effects! There may be cases where a particular sword will not go insane; a paladin's **holy avenger** sword would probably not be over-concerned if its user were drowned — after all, another worthy wielder will turn up.

All the ill effects of any insanity will be in addition to the powers that a magic sword would 'normally' possess. In some cases this may make the sane powers of the sword worse than useless. In more extreme cases the insanity of the sword may well subtly pervert the sane powers of the weapon. In really extreme cases the sane powers may be totally overwhelmed, resulting in a weapon with some very strange abilities.

The insanities that swords develop can thus be divided into two groups. Minor Insanities only affect the use of the sword, not its essential nature. Major Insanities are much more serious, altering an apparently normal blade into... something else.

Major Insanities

These are afflictions which alter the behaviour of a sword and all its abilities. In creating a sword for a campaign, the Dungeon Master should roll up its powers and abilities using the tables in the **Dungeon Masters Guide (DMG)** p166-7 and then add some form of insanity to the blade. The following examples will illustrate the differences in degree of insanity that can exist.

† This shortsword/long dagger was made for a halfling assassin who used the disguise of paladin for so long that he came to believe in it. The blade alternates between being a **holy avenger** and a **dagger of venom**. It always does 2-5 damage.

As a holy avenger it does +5 damage in the hands of a paladin, has all the other holy avenger abilities, and can **detect invisible objects**, cast a **protection from evil** once per day, **detect traps** and **summon a ki-rin** for 1 turn once every two weeks. Against an assassin it does extra damage —



Minor Insanities

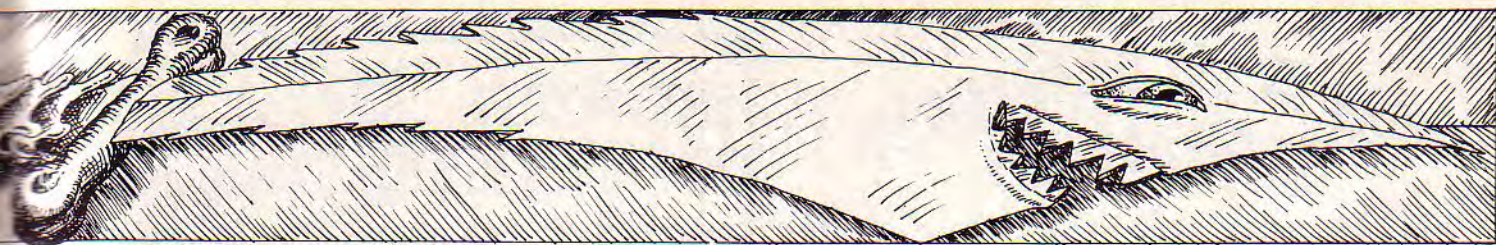
These examples of insanity can be applied to almost any type of sword. They do not alter any other ability of the sword unless specifically stated in the description.

† **Claustrophobic Sword** †
This magic sword is 'normal', except that it will refuse to enter its scabbard. A character attempting to sheath the sword must talk it into the idea of going into a closed space (obtain a positive result using the Loyalty table on p36 of the **DMG**) or force it to do so (have a greater strength than the ego of the sword).

Failure means that the sword must be carried round in the open, which can be inconvenient if a peaceful appearance is required. Putting the sword down will not solve matters, because it may not like being left on its own.

† **Shivering Sword** †
This magical sword is so afraid of fighting that it shivers with fright during melees. This causes it to have 12 attacks per round instead of its normal allowance, but all the attacks are at -1 instead of its 'sane' bonus. Any 'to hit' strength bonus due to the wielder only applies to the first attack. Any other abilities or powers of the sword are unaffected. Does only 1pt of damage.





† **Beserk Sword of Dancing** †
A beserk dancing sword will behave as a 'normal' magical intelligent sword, until in mortal combat with a strong foe of opposite alignment, (a randomly determined alignment if the sword is neutral). Then it will leap into the air and begin to dance in the same way as a standard **sword of dancing**, except that its combat bonus may be as high as +5. Once it has become a sword +5 it remains in this condition.

Holy Revenger
the assassin's level x2 points of damage.
When this weapon is a **dagger of venom** it will poison any victim on a natural roll of 20. Even if the saving throw (made at -1) is successful, the victim will be in such pain that all subsequent attacks will be made at -4. A paladin's normal saving throw bonus becomes a -4 penalty against the venom of this weapon. The venom never needs renewing. When using the weapon, an assassin's chances of successfully assassinating a victim are calculated as though the assassin were two levels higher.

Once the monsters are finally beaten the sword will turn on its wielder and any companions. If they run the sword will follow, with a movement rate of 15+. Spells or **boots of speed** are the characters' only hope of escape, for the sword cannot be physically attacked. Once all the combatants in a particular melee are dead (or have escaped) the sword will sink to the ground and resume its former 'normal' state.

†
The blade can also **detect good**, cast a **protection from good** once per day, **resist fire** once per day and **summon** either a dao or efreet for 1 turn every two weeks. The user of the blade must concentrate upon controlling the summoned monster, lest it turn upon him or her.

†
The nature of the blade varies in an unpredictable fashion, but it never spends more than 3 weeks in one form. It has an intelligence of 17 and an ego of 19. It will attempt to slay all who are not assassins or insane paladins.



† **BloodFearer Sword** †
Bloodfearing (or haemophobic) weapons will scream (those that have the power of speech) and faint upon drawing blood. The scream attracts any wandering monsters that happen to be nearby. The faint lasts from 1-4 melee rounds and strips the sword of any magical abilities and combat bonuses that it may possess while it is 'unconscious'. In extreme cases, the sword may cease to be a rigid object when it faints,

†
becoming completely flexible (and useless as a weapon) until it regains 'consciousness'.

†
These weapons are unworried by combat against creatures who have no blood — such as the undead or shambling mounds, and by fights in the dark (they can't see the blood). Hardier weapons of this type are thanophobic — they only faint upon seeing a dead creature.

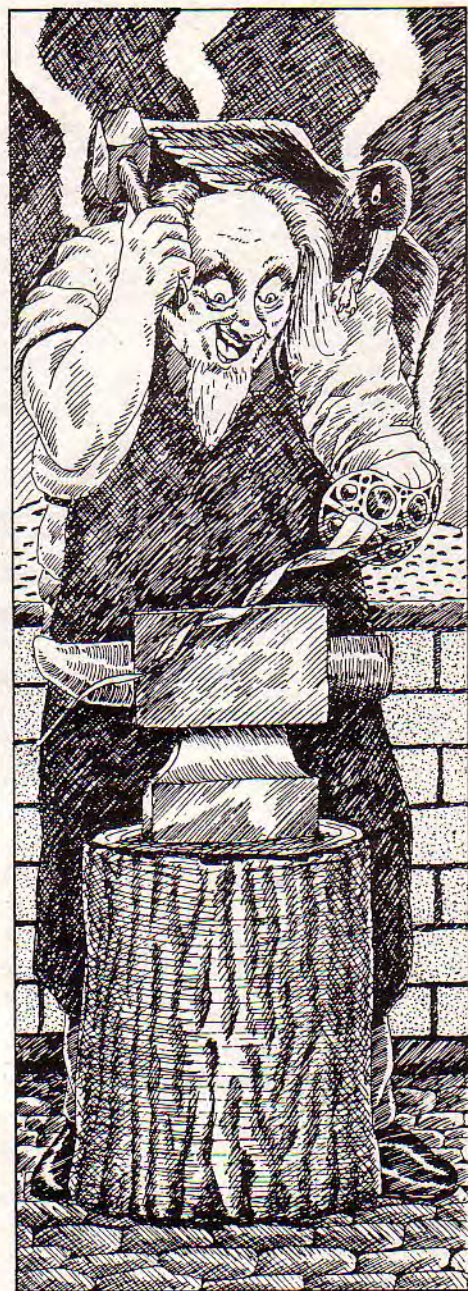
† **BrittleBlade Sword** †
An affliction of ancient swords, due to their fear of hurting themselves, this manifests itself as an adjustment of the 'to hit' bonus of the sword depending upon the Armour Class of its user's opponent. Against opponents with an AC of 7 or worse, the blade acts as a +3 weapon. There is no bonus at all if the opponent's AC is between 4 and 6, and against lower ACs the bonus becomes a penalty. For every one class lower than AC 4, a penalty of -1 is accrued — thus a BrittleBlade Sword acts as a sword -3 vs an AC 1 opponent.

Dexterity bonuses or adjustments due to items that are not pieces of armour (such as **rings of protection** or a **cloak of displacement**) are not included in determining the opponent's effective Armour Class.

† **Narcissistic Sword** †
This sword believes that it has a magnetic personality. As a result, once the sword's ego has been calculated normally it is increased by a further 50%. Naturally, because it is so lovely, the blade has a magnetic effect on any metal near it. The wielder must have a strength of 18 or the sword will stick to any metal elements of his or her armour, and no 'to hit' or damage bonuses are applicable.

Against foes in metal armour the weapon acts as a sword +3, and does double damage. However, the wielder must spend one round unsticking the sword from the target, during which time she or he can do nothing else.

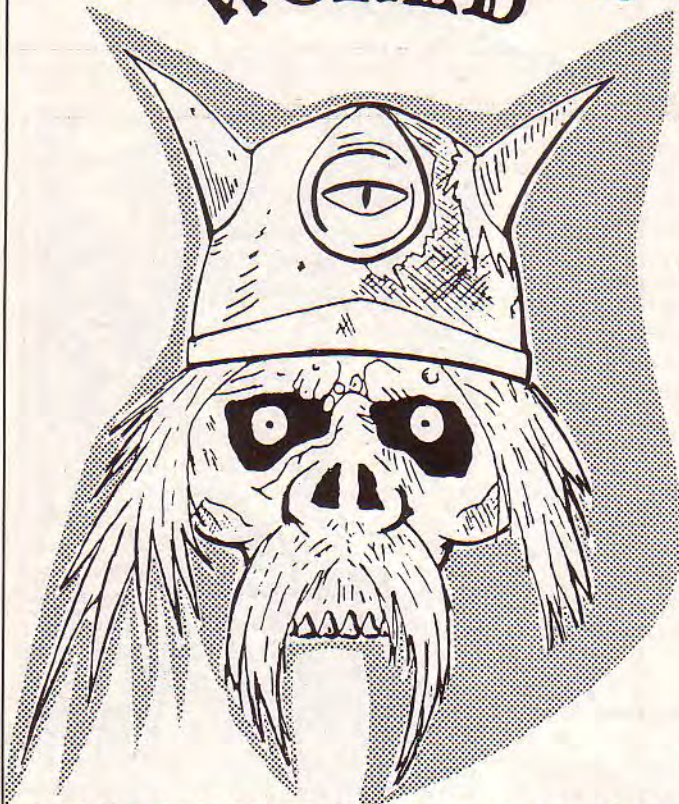
The sword is not actually magnetic, it just likes metal — especially when it can see its own reflection.



† **Agoraphobic Sword** †
This sword is the exact opposite of the Claustrophobic Sword. It must be talked (or forced) out of its scabbard. Once it is out, it will fight as a sword +3 and do double damage, in order to get back into its scabbard as quickly as possible. If its wielder is struck, there is a percentage chance equal to the number of points of damage sustained that the sword will take advantage of the situation to escape back into the security of the scabbard.

†
If the wielder does not fight during a melee round he or she must do nothing but concentrate on keeping the sword out of its scabbard, otherwise it will return to where it feels 'safe'. Note that this concentration does not preclude using the sword's special abilities, because the character is already thinking about the sword.

CRASIMOFF'S WORLD



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'There are tokens detailing magic, spells, creatures, parties met, artifacts, treasure, money, and many other items which you discover as you play the game. KJC games has been running the Crasimoff's World for over a year now, and the effort the gamesmaster puts into each turn never ceases to amaze me. Most players find themselves offering a different scenario each turn, or find that a new twist has happened to an existing adventure.'

As reviewed in

WHITE DWARF

37

If you wish to enrol in Crasimoff's World, send a £5.00 cheque/P.O. payable to KJC Games. For this you will receive a rulebook, set up material, the latest newsletter, and the first four rounds. Future rounds are £1.25 each. European rates as UK.

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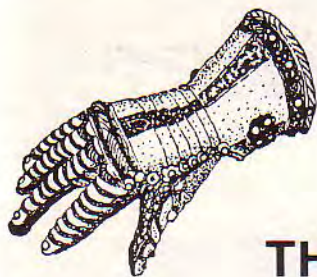
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CHAIN MAIL *by Brian Creese*

A bi-monthly feature about the postal gaming hobby

THE COMMERCIAL PBM GAMES

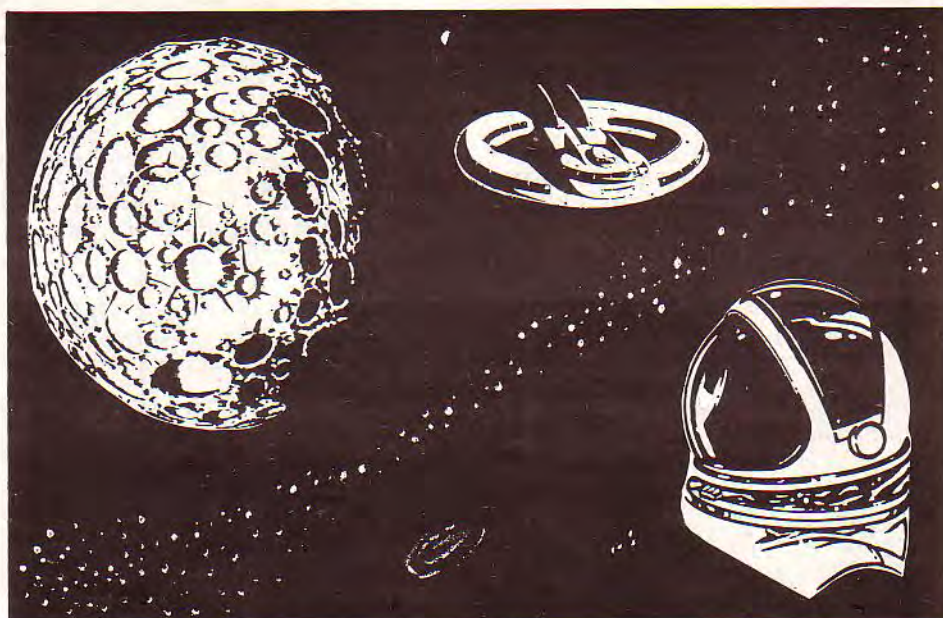
Episode 1 — In the Beginning

Over the past year the fastest growing area of the games hobby by far has been the playing of Computer Moderated games by post — pbm games for short. In very little time indeed, a massive hobby has arisen from nothing, a fact generally overlooked by most gamers. Given the obvious similarities between the FRP and Postal Games hobbies, it was perhaps unsurprising that when I was asked to do the **Chain Mail** series, I was also asked to look after a few pbm reviews.

I called on some friends to share these reviews; colleagues with similar backgrounds to me, being very much from the postal hobby and with no previous experience of pbm games (I'm sure the distinction between postal games and pbm — play-by-mail — is going to seem a little ridiculous to some people, but for the purposes of this column, pbm will mean those games played by post which are run by groups, organisations or individuals on a commercial basis; a business rather than a hobby). I shall review these games in a series of three articles, starting with an introduction to the games and reviewers. The second article will tell you more about the various campaigns and worlds, and the final piece will sum up our feelings on all the games.

First off with the reviewers, we have ageing games personality Steve Doubleday, who is playing in Mitre Games' **Starmaster**. Steve is an SF freak and was immediately gripped by the broad scope of the game. The first task is to create an alien and its home planet. The rules seem quite cleverly constructed so that you have a choice of three different kinds of civilisation: individualistic, hive mind or psionic. No prizes for guessing which category humans would fit into!

Steve feels that the rules could be better organised and are desperately in need of an index. The lack of this helped cause a long delay in making the first move — the construction of planet and race. In response to this first move, 10 sheets of extra rules arrived, many needing cross referencing to the initial rule-book. Generally speaking, this game seems to require quite a lot of effort to get going, but this is inevitable given its design. And what sort of creature has Steve created, and what part does it play in the pan-galactic empire? Well, I'll tell you about that next time...



Tribes of Crane is one of the longest-lived of the pbm games, and this is being played by Claire Walkerdine. This game takes place in a world peopled by various wandering tribes, one of which is controlled by Claire. To start the game, you create the members of your tribe and equip them to go out into this medieval world. Essentially, **Tribes** can be wandering, merchants, war-like or sea tribes. Claire also found that quite a lot of work was necessary to start the game, but having done so she is now ready to go out into the world and... Yes, you guessed it. I'll tell you how she finds the world in issue 16.

A game run by one of my own subscribers is **Warboids World**, and this is being played by a man who has formerly run both postal games and Science Fiction zines, Nick Shears. **Warboids World** is set in a distant future where computers and robots have wiped out mankind and are now battling with each other. Players assume the roles of Subterranean Industrial Complexes (STICs) — sentient computers who control boids (warlike robots) working on the planet's surface. The STICs strive to close each other down using 27 varieties of boid as their surrogates. The different boids have different special abilities, of which more next time, and much of the 24-page rulebook is taken up with explaining these and the various orders which go with them. Little understanding is required for the first move, however, since you start the game with few bids and little energy, which allows you few options.

My own game is **Crasimoff's World** — the only one of the bunch that isn't computer-moderated. **Crasimoff's World** has had many civilisations and many rulers, but the greatest of them was Crasimoff who ruled with his strange people, the Astoffs. The Astoffs had great knowledge of science, but also great appreciation of magic, and they successfully discovered the elixir of life which kept their rulers alive for thousands of years. But a rogue plague destroyed the Astoff civilisation and only a few remain, almost forgotten by the now dominant human population. Into this scenario I have had to create a party of adventurers to go out and investigate the world. The rules were fairly straightforward, though I found it took time to construct a party of 9 characters, as I insisted on giving them all some rudimentary personality. Starting from a town initial movement was fairly arbitrary, but I decided to make for a ruin in the mountains. One nice feature of this game is that I have already made contact with another player after only a few moves. Next time I'll tell you all I've learned about the Astoffs...

Brian Creese

Starmaster: Mitre Games, Lothlorien, 77 Burntwood Grange Road, Wandsworth Common, London SW18

Tribes of Crane: Mitre Games, as above

Warboids World: Roger Trethewey, 39 Chapman Avenue, Maidstone, Kent

Crasimoff's World: KJC Games, 5 Vicarage Avenue, Cleveleys, Lancs

THE ADVENTURES OF NIC NOVICE

PART FOURTEEN EXPERIENCE

WHILE EXPLORING THE KOBOLD LAIR, THE ADVENTURERS RESCUE A DWARF. HIS NAME IS SNORRI GERDSON AND HE LIVES NOT FAR AWAY IN A MINE.... THE CHARACTERS ACCOMPANY HIM TO HIS HOME, WHERE THEY ARE OFFERED FOOD, DRINK AND SHELTER....



THANK YOU FOR FREEING ME FROM THE DOG FOLK... I WOULD LIKE YOU TO HAVE THESE PRECIOUS STONES...

YOU ARE MOST GENEROUS!!!

... AND YOU ARE ALL WELCOME TO STAY AS LONG AND AS OFTEN AS YOU WISH....

... WE MAY DO THAT, FOR WE MUST STILL RESCUE THE PEOPLE OF ABONE WHO WERE CARRIED OFF BY THE ORCS!!

... AND GET MORE LOOT!

Participants in fantasy role-playing games play the parts of fearless fighters, devout clerics, spell-casting magic users and cunning thieves in many exciting and unique adventures. The following is an account of a Basic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. Sue is the Dungeon Master or referee who has previously prepared the adventure and runs it according to the game's rules. She acts as the eyes and ears of the party, describing what they can see and reasonably expect to know. The players then react to her descriptions as their characters would if they were in the situation described.

The party consists of five characters:
Nic - **Norva Ironarms** (1st level fighter)
Jon - **Brumhold** (1st level fighter)
Terry - **Lemmy**, (2nd level thief)
Anne - **Jolinda**, (1st level cleric)
Alan - **Sarak**, (1st level magic user).

While exploring a kobold lair the adventurers rescued Snorri Gerdson, a dwarf. Snorri told them that he is a miner and lives a few hours journey away from the kobold lair. The characters decided to accompany Snorri to his camp.

Sue — 'Snorri leads you north through the woods. After a few hours he turns east towards the mountains. Soon you see a cave mouth with a mining cart and a few tools in the opening. A movement catches your eye and you see two dwarves running towards you. They greet Snorri enthusiastically and welcome you. They invite you into the mine and lead you into a homely room.

While Grobsek is taken away by the dwarves, Snorri excuses himself, saying he wants to change. Before long Snorri returns washed and dressed in clean clothes. More dwarves arrive, bringing you hot steaming food and large brimming tankards of beer.

Snorri bangs his tankard on the table and the dwarves look at him respectfully.

'Thank you, for freeing me from the dog folk. In part payment for my freedom I would like to you to have these stones.' He hands a leather pouch to Sarak.'

Alan — 'Sarak says "thank you" and opens the pouch.'

Sue — 'Inside you find five red gems worth 500gp each.'

Sarak — 'You are most generous Snorri. We are greatly honoured.'

Lemmy's eyes light up at the sight of the gems and her face breaks into a grin. 'Well we got some loot at last. Er, Snorri, you said this was part payment, is there more?'

Brumhold — 'Are you never satisfied, thief? Noble Snorri has rewarded us well and all you can think of is how much else you can get.'

Snorri — 'The rest of my payment is not in wealth but in aid. You are all welcome to stay here as long and as often as you like. Our community will always welcome you.'

Lemmy — 'Is that it? You mean there's no more money?'

Norva — 'Is it not enough that we have a place of safety from which to attack the orc's castle?'

Snorri — 'Strange you should mention that Norva, for I had meant to broach that very subject myself. But first, tell me what you know of the orcs?'

Norva — 'They raided Abone and carried off the people. We were tracking them through the woods when we rescued Grobsek the kobold from a group of them. He told us that they lived in a castle and that he knew of a secret way into the

castle. He was lying, of course, and led us to where the rest of his tribe were. You know the rest.'

Snorri — 'Interesting. I had not realised the orcs were pillaging so far west.' Snorri looks thoughtful and pulls at his beard.

Sarak — 'You are familiar with these monsters?'

Snorri — 'Yes, I have known of their presence for a long time. Recently they have become more organised and efficient. No longer as mindless as they were. The reason for this escaped me until I was captured by the kobolds. While chained to that wall, on a number of occasions I saw a dark mysterious figure enter the kobold chief's room through a secret door.'

Sarak — 'What did he look like?'

Snorri — 'He was dressed in a similar fashion to you. Long, dark blue robes covered in moons and stars. He'd speak to the chief offering him wealth if he would do as instructed. If the chief wouldn't agree he would threaten to destroy all his people.

Now, as you can imagine, just hanging around there, I was able to listen to their conversations. This dark character controls the orcs and is planning vile things. He's probably going to sacrifice the villagers in some unspeakable ritual to a demon or something. Now I don't like orcs and I hate evil sorcerers even more. So I'm willing to help you get rid of 'em.'

Jolinda — 'We will be pleased to have your aid Snorri. We must rescue the villagers and put an end to this abomination.'

Lemmy is a little hesitant about going back, but the others are keen and she is finally lured by the prospect of more loot.



...ALIAS NORVA
IRONARMS!

AS ONE ADVENTURE ENDS
THE PLAYERS BEGIN TO
PLAN THEIR NEXT MOVES.
... MEANWHILE, SUE,
THE DUNGEON MASTER,
CALCULATES THE EXPERIENCE
POINTS (XPS) EARNED
BY THE PLAYERS...
... NIC, ALIAS NORVA
IRONARMS EARNS
660XPS. HE FEELS HE
IS NO LONGER A NOVICE
BUT WELL ON HIS WAY TO
BECOMING AN
EXPERIENCED GAMER!!



The adventurers and Snorri spend the rest of the evening drinking and planning their next moves.

Sue calculates the experience points (xps) earned by the players during the adventure to date and divides it between them. Including monsters and treasure this amounts to 600 experience points each. All of the players, because of their prime requisites, are entitled to an extra 10% on earned experience giving them 660 xps.

They then add this to their totals giving Jolinda, Brumhold, Sarak and Lemmy a total of 1910 xps. As this was Norva's first adventure he has no previous experience and so has only the 660 xps. He is, however, pleased with this and is eager to earn more.

Jolinda has enough experience points to become a second level cleric, after a period of meditation. Anne rolls her new hit points and gets a 5, plus 2 for her constitution of 16, making 7 altogether. She now adds this to her first level hits (5) giving a total of 12. As well as gaining extra hit points, Jolinda's chances of turning undead increase and she is able to cast one spell a day. With her new hit points and magical abilities Jolinda is now a much more formidable character.

With her new spell ability she first heals Brumhold's wounds using a **cure light wounds** spell and the next day she heals her own.

The following day the party sets out with Snorri to the kobold's lair, to find the secret tunnel and enter the orc's castle. There they hope to put an end to the plots of the evil magic user and to gain more experience. Whether they will is another story for Nic is no longer a novice but well on his way to becoming an experienced gamer...

THE END

Jim Bamba & Paul Ruiz

DISPEL CONFUSION

Role-playing games have complex rules which sometimes cause problems of interpretation to gamers. **Dispel Confusion** is a column intended to help by providing solutions to these problems.

At present we mainly answer questions about TSR games, and while the answers we arrive at may not be fully official, we do at least have contact with the designers.

An answer column needs questions, so send yours to: **Dispel Confusion**, TSR UK Ltd, The Mill, Rathmore Road, CAMBRIDGE CB1 4AD.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® and ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® games

Q. The Players Handbook states that thieves can be lawful in alignment, or even neutral good! Isn't this a bit of a contradiction? (*Advanced*)

A. Not really. 'Lawful' does not necessarily mean 'law-abiding', although the two may be related. Lawful alignment is a belief in a system where rewards are dependent upon adhering to the rules. Lawful evil characters see the world as a structured place, where the weak serve the needs of the strong.

A lawful evil thief could see him or herself as a predator upon the weak — by this definition, those unable to keep what is theirs. The other alternative for a lawful evil thief is to be a member of a criminal hierarchy, similar to, for example, the Mafia. Individuals within the group obey the group's rules, yet society's laws are scorned.

The one that really looks like a contradiction in terms is the neutral good thief, yet the idea of 'robbing the rich to give to the poor' fits perfectly. Neutral good characters want the most beneficial conditions for living things in general, and redistribution of wealth through thievery may well be seen as one way of achieving this aim.

Q. Is it possible to have a female paladin? (*Advanced*)

A. The answer to this one is a definite (non-sexist) yes. The AD&D™ and D&D® games systems make no distinction between male and female characters, although 'he' rather than 'he or she' is used in the rules.

Q. What is the effect of wolvesbane on lycanthropes? (*Basic & Advanced*)

A. The effects of wolvesbane in the Basic game are clearly defined in the Dungeon Masters Rulebook, p33. In the Advanced game, we suggest that wolvesbane has a similar effect upon were-creatures to that of garlic upon

vampires — the lycanthrope will recoil if the wolvesbane is presented boldly. It will not be driven off, but will hesitate for 1-4 melee rounds before attacking.

Q. Are the anti-paladin, anti-ranger, samurai and houri character classes officially part of the AD&D game? (*Advanced*)

A. No. Although many new character classes have been published over the years, very few have made it to official status. The ranger, for example, began as an article in one of the very early issues of **Strategic Review** (a precursor of **DRAGON**® magazine), and was incorporated into the official AD&D game when the Players Handbook was published.

Other than the barbarian (in #2 of **IMAGINE**™ magazine), the thief-acrobat (#6), and the cavalier (#11) there have been no official character classes since the Players Handbook was published. This has not stopped the flood of unofficial material, much of which has been quite interesting. Many players find that the classes in the Players Handbook do not serve the needs of their own campaign, which might, for example, feature a very powerful evil religion, of which anti-paladins might be a part.

However, many of the character classes are attempts to produce super-powerful characters, allowing some players to unbalance the game — the ninja (an assassin variant based upon the medieval Japanese spies and killers) was particularly easy to exploit in this manner.

There are two other points to note in connection with unofficial character classes. Firstly, many DMs may not allow such characters into their campaigns because they do not know the rules governing those characters — every DM knows how a fighter 'works', but how many know the details of the merchant or the toady? Secondly, while they may not be completely suitable for player characters, unofficial classes make interesting NPCs for parties to encounter.

Q. Are piercers, trappers and lurkers above detectable by infravision? (*Advanced*)

A. We think that they are not. If they were, their prey (other than tasty adventurers) would spot them in time to take action, as most creatures that live underground have infravision as an ability.

Furthermore, the descriptions of the monsters make it clear that they are indistinguishable from their surroundings.

Mike Brunton, Graeme Morris,
Phil Gallagher and Jim Bamba

GIVE ME NIGHT OR GIVE ME BLUCHER

Wellington's Victory and Battle Over Britain

TSR have done gaming a service. They have rescued **Wellington's Victory** and **Battle Over Britain** from the defunct SPI® games series. Both games represent the finest aspects of SPI.

Wellington's Victory is a grand tactical simulation of the Battle of Waterloo. The battlefield is represented on four 22x34" map sheets. The full game needs lots of space, but scenarios can be played with two maps. 2000 counters show the historical units and informational markers. The other game components include a rules and scenario booklet, two useful plastic counter trays and a die. The complete game is truly gigantic, yet scenarios can be set up and played in six to eight hours.

Essentially a two player game, it plays well as a solitaire. I would strongly advise that it is played by a number of players per side. Three players can cope with the Anglo/Allied and Prussian armies, and three or four for the French, each with a corps or two. The rules are rather lengthy and fairly hard going. It is

worth hacking through them because on understanding them, you appreciate the design. Of course the real reward is that you learn not only an enjoyable game, but one that recreates the feel of Napoleonic warfare. The game goes further than assigning units a simplistic 'combat factor'. Units have fire factors depending on size, morale and formation. It even differentiates between the continental system of three deep line and the more fire-efficient British line in two ranks. No ruling is given in favour of rifles' superior range. Presumably this is offset by a lower rate of fire.

Formation is all-important, columns move quickly, lines have a greater rate of fire but only a square can withstand a cavalry charge. Shock combat (melee) is dealt with separately. Unit size and facing are critical. God help the thin red line when hit in flank or rear. Morale is dealt with very comprehensively. Each unit is given an effectiveness rating which determines its ability to fire, engage in melee and withstand adverse conditions. In addition army morale overall is dealt with. Cavalry movement is an eye-opener.

When they go into a charge, the stately pace of infantry is forgotten as the rules go into overdrive.

Units in cavalry charge zones crumble or countercharge and the commander can forget about being in control for a while.

The rules on skirmishers are a little dubious. Only high morale units may provide skirmishers. To an extent this was true of the British and Prussian armies but surely the French should be able to unleash hordes of poorly trained skirmishers? A change of format to a bookcase game is welcome but the box art is terrible. Why not use the original print of the first edition?

Despite minor flaws the game is a classic. You feel the pressure the commanders felt. As Wellington you look on your thinning ranks and can honestly wish that God will 'Give me night or give me Blucher'.

In stark contrast, in the **Battle Over Britain** game the British player never wants night or the Germans. Simulating the air war over Britain in August and

BLUE AND GRAY

Part of every reviewer's life is the hurried effort to get to know the game thoroughly, to be able to write a fair review before the deadline. What a novelty, then, to be faced with writing a review of a game with which one has eight years familiarity! The game in question is the old SPI classic **Blue and Gray**, first released in 1975, now revised and re-issued by TSR.

This was one of the first SPI 'quadri-games' — four games in one package using the same basic rules, with a few 'exclusive' rules for each. The games cover four battles of the American Civil War; Shiloh, Antietam, Cemetery Ridge (Gettysburg), and Chickamauga. Each

game uses 100 or less counters and a 17x22" map.

The game system used is a very simple one, derived with few modifications from that pioneered in the early **Napoleon at Waterloo** game, and from which most wargames are ultimately descended. Its simplicity makes it low on realism but high on playability — a game can be completed easily in an evening or less. The rules are easily learned, and even for the more experienced player, the games can still be a lot of fun.

The TSR re-issue includes a number of changes, mostly to the presentation. The counters are vastly improved, being glossy, back-printed, and with the set-up

hexes printed on them, which makes setting up the game easier. The maps are all now contained on a single, back-printed 34x22" sheet. The rules have been completely re-written in an informal style to try to make the game easier for the beginner to pick up. Also, the 'exclusive' rules that only apply to one game out of the four have all been integrated into the one rules booklet, which is nicely illustrated and contains historical material at the back. The rules themselves are only slightly altered.

In conclusion, for those interested in making a start in historical wargaming, I cannot think of a better introduction. Recommended. **Roger Musson**

A GLEAM OF BAYONETS

First, a little wargames history. In 1976 SPI released a monster game on that most famous of American Civil War battles, Gettysburg. This was **Terrible Swift Sword** — TSS. The game system it used was very good, being highly detailed but still easy to grasp. So SPI designed other games using the same system on other, mostly smaller, battles from the same war. They were in the final stages of the tenth to use the TSS system, a big game on the battle of Antietam, when they went bust.

Now for the good news; TSR have picked up the pieces and

brought the game out under the title **A Glean of Bayonets**.

Antietam marked the furthest push of the first Confederate offensive (1862), at which point the Army of North Virginia under Robert E Lee was blocked by a Union army twice its size. The resulting battle should have been a resounding Union victory, had it not been for the Union Commander-in-Chief, McClellan, who, by making only piecemeal attacks, managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

The physical production of the game is very good. In particular, someone at TSR had the bright idea of colour-coding the units of each corps for easy recognition.

And with 700 combat units on a 34x44" map, this helps! Including markers, there are 1600 counters — this is a big game.

And since it is a big game, it takes a big investment of time and effort to play it. But seeing a major battle recreated this way, in this much detail, is a very rewarding gaming experience.

In conclusion, if you don't have previous experience of this sort of game, it would be better to pick up one of the smaller TSS-type games before tackling such a large example as this. Those already hooked on the TSS system, though, will need no recommendation from me to rush out and buy this game.

Roger Musson

Distributors' names are given for information only

AIR WAR

Air War is a game that demands superlatives. Ever since it became known that the manuscript rules were some 280 pages long, this game has had a reputation as the most complicated, most difficult game ever devised. For a small dedicated band, the game has acquired cult status, while most gamers shudder at the very name. The designer's intention was to provide as accurate a simulation of modern fighter combat as is possible within the limitations of a boxed game, and by and large he has succeeded. You name it, it's here: Immelmans and barrel rolls, heat-seeking and radar-homing missiles, radar jamming, bombing and strafing, surface-to-air missiles, detailed charts of most of today's major combat aircraft, and lots more.

This game has now been re-issued by TSR; the new package comprises the original SPI® game as issued in 1977, plus the 1980 expansion set, which includes much addenda and errata. The box art has been improved, the counters are now glossy, and the 'maps' (eight small blank hex sheets) are now printed on white paper instead of blue stock (and are a little too flimsy). That apart, the only differences between old and new versions are the copyright messages.

So what does one make of the game itself? Speaking as one of the 'shudders', I was pleasantly surprised to discover how much fun the game was the first time I actually played it. There are two things which make *Air War* an easier game than its reputation suggests. Firstly, the rules are very well written; Dave Isby is one of the best rules writers in the business, and only one or two points are obscure. Secondly, for a simple dogfight between Mig-15s and Sabres, you only need a fraction of the rules. You can leave all the extra on missiles, radar, etc, until you're ready for it.

Even so, *Air War* is definitely not a game for the novice. It requires a lot of effort just to fly your plane, let alone shoot another one down.... but for an experienced gamer who wants the best simulation of modern air combat available, this is it.

Roger Musson

These five SPI® games are distributed by TSR UK Ltd and cost £24.95 each.

These games are available from hobby shops

September 1940, the game is of epic proportions. The detail is remarkable even for SPI.

Although billed as a two player game once again it is good as a solitaire. Two players a side helps play considerably; the Germans should take either Luftflotte 2 or Luftflotte 3 and 5, the British players either Groups 11 and 13 or 10 and 12.

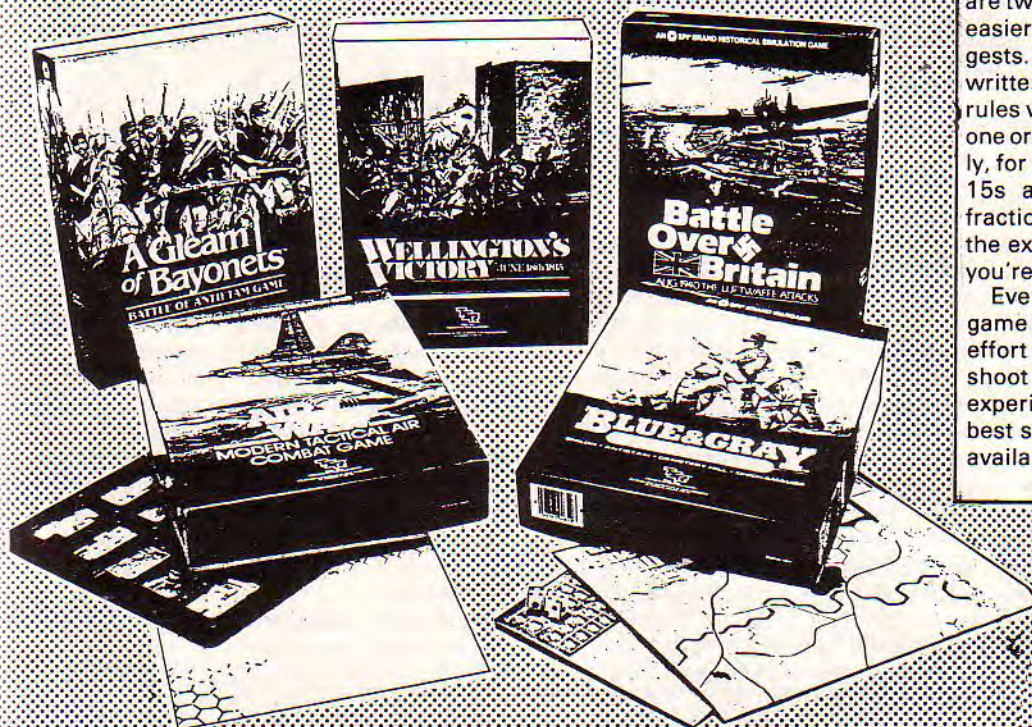
The game consists of two beautiful 22x34" maps of Britain and Northern France. Only one need be used in play, the other makes an attractive poster. The British Airfield Display must be kept secret from the German and unfortunately the Dividing Screen provided is not really up to the task. The 800 counters are the usual high quality cardboard and a d20 and counter tray are also included. Printed on the map are target symbols for the Germans to hit. The British player also deploys fighter factories and command centres as hidden targets. He also deploys flak to cover the targets. The Germans may attempt to destroy any of these targets. If he is not successful the Führer will assign him others.

The game has three levels, a strategic

game which last about 15 hours, a full campaign which lasts for days and a combat game which specializes in small unit combat within a single hex. The German player plans his raids deciding day or night time, and which forces to be used. En route to the target he is picked up on radar and perhaps by observers. He has to give information about the raid size. Acting upon this, the British player decides whether to intercept and with which units. He is limited by available information and may only be able to scramble a squadron or two. In air combat the German may use hunting or close support fighters. If the British fight through the hunters, they may engage the main force. The German must decide whether to continue the raid or abort. If the German wins through he has to take a flak attack and may then bomb or strafe before flying home. In all it's a game for master tacticians rather than be-goggled fighter pilots. A subtle and tense contest between the mighty Luftwaffe and 'The Few'.

Peter O'Toole

NOTICES



SHERLOCK HOLMES, CONSULTING DETECTIVE

Blown by the March wind, you make your way to 221B Baker Street. Outside, you meet up with Wiggins, chief of the Baker Street irregulars. You have been summoned to the presence of the world's greatest detective for your first case...

Sherlock Holmes is a fascinating person (in book or film form) and following his superb logic and reasoning is great fun. So what better subject to build a detective game around? Holmes' London has great atmosphere, and much of the background flavour to the game will already be common knowledge.

The game has to offer something special to justify its relatively high price. The components are of fair quality, but studying the system shows that tremendous effort has been put into developing the scenarios (or 'Cases') and the clues necessary to the game.

The contents of the ring binder in which the game is supplied are a (reassuringly thin) rulebook, a newspaper archive, a map of Central London for the period, plus three booklets involved with the cases themselves (a Case Book, a Clue Book and a Quiz Book). All these components can be neatly put away in the internal pockets of the binder, so the game stores away very conveniently.

The smallest booklet is the Rulebook which tells you little more than the contents of the game and how to use the components. Although the rules allow for two-player and group games, it is as a solo game that **Consulting Detective** succeeds magnificently. It is probably the first solo play adventure that actually maintains interest during play — perhaps because it is entirely detective work

without resorting to boring combat (not very much fun solo). There is also an element of variety in the large number of choices for each case and they do not have to be followed up in any particular order. Rather than the rulebook dictating play, it is the case-related books that provide the essential information.

Before pitting your brain against the devious criminal, you are treated to a useful lecture from the great man about the art of being a consulting detective. As with all the information, it pays to take in what is said. Holmes also gives you the names and addresses of people who will help you during your investigation — from respectable barristers to rogues with connections in the underground (and I don't mean the Tubel).

From Holmes' lecture, the action turns to **The Case of the Murdered Munitions Magnate**. You meet your client at Holmes' address and having been presented with the necessary information, proceed with your investigation.

In some cases, the information you get is minimal. In Case Three all you get is a short note through the post from Holmes! As well as the facts supplied by the Case Book, there is also the relevant issue of *The Times* from the Newspaper Archive to help you (naturally you can only refer to copies printed before the date of your case!). It is then up to you how you proceed — by following up clues from the paper and your client, plus additional information obtained from various people, you have to build a theory around the facts and so deduce the villain of the plot.

It is this system that makes **Sherlock Holmes** unique — freed from conventional restrictions, the game is more dependent on your own ability to make decisions

and act on them. It pays to think carefully about which clues to follow up — you have no chance of matching Holmes' performance if you follow every suspicious trail. The idea is to use as few clues as possible to solve the case and be able to answer the relevant quiz correctly — this nets you points for the case.

Also important (besides getting the correct answer) is the amount of time (in game turns) that you use to solve the case. You can expect Holmes to solve a case efficiently by involving very few clues in his reasoning. Your performance is measured against Holmes' ability (he always scores 100), with points for correctly answered questions being modified by the time taken. My first score was a magnificent -35, although one tends to learn quickly on the second case (+25!). To ease all your frustrations, Holmes sums up the facts and his conclusions so you can see how he would have acted given the same information (if your brain is whirring at the end of the first case, it's advisable to put the game down for a day or so!).

There are faults — most are annoying little points which escaped the American designer (eg *The Old Bailey* is referred to as 'Old Bailey', etc). Apparently these mistakes have been corrected for the second edition. Otherwise, the game runs well and offers a different form of mental exercise to doing the crossword. A welcome change in the face of gaming. Now, where did I put my deerstalker...?

Dave Durant

Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective (£19.95) from Dowsey Games, 19 Reynolds Close, London NW11 7EA.

B5 — HORROR ON THE HILL

Guido's Fort lies at the end of the traders' road with only the mile wide River Shril separating it from 'The Hill', — 'a land of nameless terrors and ancient legends....' **B5** is the latest in the Basic series of modules which are specifically designed for beginning DMs. It consists of about 20 encounters on the surface of the hill, a well-detailed monastery, three dungeon levels located somewhere beneath the hill and details of three new monsters.

The map of the surface of the hill looks a mess. The detail is in black and white and the trees which cover the hill are represented by a blotchy grey which makes the contours and trails, etc difficult to distinguish without close inspection.

The contours for some reason are at 80

rather than 50 or 100 foot intervals; and the swamps to the south and west are not marked.

There are also several small mistakes in the text, the worst in play terms being the discrepancies between the maps and text over whether doors are locked or not. The mistakes are not serious but even so, there is no excuse for them.

Generally though, the presentation is clear and the module contains many helpful hints for the first time DM.

Enough of the presentation; what of the actual scenario? The adventure starts in Guido's Fort about which little information is given. Consequently it can easily be incorporated into an existing campaign, although some more detail would be useful to enable it to be run as a one-off dungeon. On the whole the scenario is balanced and logical with few gaps.

However, the 'Two Old Ladies' encounter which is fairly likely to form a central part of the adventure is a bit unbelievable. Given the number of monsters roaming around and the fact that the ladies live alone, they should have been had for breakfast years ago.

The adventure, for 5-10 1st to 3rd level characters, should last three to four sessions of play, the last one producing a few deaths if all 1st-level characters are being used. Apart from the hill map and the awful title, **Horror on the Hill** is a worthwhile addition to the Basic scenario range.

Chris Hunter

B5 - Horror on the Hill is a TSR scenario and costs £4.50

Distributors' names are given for information only

These games are available from hobby shops

Fantasy Media

Colin Greenland, author of *The Entropy Exhibition* and co-editor of *SF magazine Interzone*, reviews the latest paper and celluloid contributions to the fantasy/SF media.

You remember the night the aliens came to Centerville? You know, Centerville, PA (or was it Centerville, IL?): just another peaceful little mid-western town until that night in 1957 or '58 when there were these weird lights in the sky — and everybody came out to see — and things were never the same again. Of course you remember it. Ten minutes into **Strange Invaders** (EMI, PG), you will probably think you have seen it before. But don't walk out: this is a different movie. You see, in Centerville it is still 1958, but in the rest of the world it is 1984, and Charles Bigelow, Professor of Entomology, is wondering what the hell has happened to his wife — and his daughter — and his dog — and why the folks in Centerville are so darned unsociable. It's a nice idea. So is the other one, that the only person Bigelow can turn to is Betty Walker, a journalist who makes up UFO stories for a living.

Unfortunately, director Michael Laughlin fails to carry the ideas any further. **Strange Invaders** never quite makes up its mind whether it's a send-up or a faithful recreation of **The Invasion of the Body Snatchers**; **It Came From Outer Space**; **The Bubble**; etc. It hovers somewhere in between: too naïve to be convincing, too self-conscious to be allegorical.

Never mind, there is some good acting, especially from Nancy Allen as Betty, and Diana Scarwid as Prof Bigelow's mysterious wife Margaret; and when the aliens peel off (yecch) their human disguises, you can see why the film needed eight 'alien effects' artists. It's fun, but in the hands of, say, Larry Cohen it could have been so much more.

Savage Islands (United Artists, PG) has no intention of being anything but fun, and succeeds admirably by taking Harrison Ford to the South Seas. Well, not the real Harrison Ford, actually; but Tommy Lee Jones does so well in the lovable ruffian role, sometimes it is hard to tell.

Captain Bully Hayes was apparently a sort of South Pacific Robin Hood, a slave-trader turned freebooter — a real person, though that does not seem to bother director Ferdinand Fairfax much, and need not bother us. Just sit back and smile as Indiana Jones — sorry, Bully Hayes — almost charms the spirited Sophie from her weedy fiancé, missionary Rev Nathaniel, only to lose her to the villainous Ben Pease, once Bully's shipmate but now engaged in some very dodgy dealing with one Count von Rittenburg. The Count is steaming around the

South Seas to find a naval base for the German Empire, and Ben Pease does not see why he shouldn't help him negotiate with King Owatope, as long as the price is right. Even a rogue like Han Solo — Bully Hayes, I mean — knows this is just not on, and reluctantly steps in ('I got morals and I got standards'). And it is cheering to see Sophie pitching in too instead of just being carried around screaming.



Tommy Lee Jones as 'Bully' Hayes, Michael O'Keefe as Nate and Jenny Seagrove as Sophie in Paramount Pictures' **"SAVAGE ISLANDS"**. Distributed by United International Pictures (UK).

Savage Islands doesn't have quite the pace or panache of **Raiders of the Lost Ark**, but it is first-class nonsense. Example: our heroes' (stolen) three-masted schooner is being chased along the coast by the German gunboat. Bully & Co. not only get away without a scratch, they turn the tables on the Count, capture his boat, and blow it up. I believed every second.

For third-rate nonsense it is hard to beat the FilmTown video **Invincible Barbarian** (18). You just have to see the funny side of this Savage Saga of Tribal Massacre, Warrior Women and Primeval Revenge. Otherwise you might cry.

For a start, it is dubbed into ludicrous English, having been filmed in a place where actors are cheap and scriptwriters cheaper (Spain, my lip-reading friend assures me). Then it has been sliced to fit TV, so the heroic Zukan and the cruel Nuriak have a way of disappearing off the sides of the screen at odd moments. The story is pseudo-Conan dignified with bits of the Bible and stuff: twin boys rescued from the slaughter in their village and brought up 'with utmost care and impartiality' by a tribe of immortal Amazons, who would have been more likely to chuck them both back in the river as far as I could see. Having survived to manhood, one of them has to kill the other anyway,

to claim his birthright — one talisman, one mighty sword — and then hoof off across the countryside to take vengeance on the nasty Nuriak, who seems to be wearing talcum powder in his hair. Fight scenes are sparsely choreographed: one bloke thumps another bloke with a sword; second bloke spins around, face full of ketchup, and falls over. The Amazons, meanwhile, have come up with a revol-

utionary technological breakthrough — they've invented the shield. Zukan mistrusts this new-fangled gadget. It must be magic, he grunts, edgily. What makes this Invincible Barbarian invincible? Probably the fact that everybody he comes up against is even more stupid than he is. See how long you can watch this one without giggling.

DMs in search of inspiration could do worse than take a look at Fred Saberhagen's new book, **Empire of the East** (Futura, £2.95). Set in a far future age of swords and sorcery when science and technology are dim and discredited myths, it tells the story of young Rolf who comes home from the plough to find his home in flames, his parents butchered, and his sister gone. Striding off in a mad rage for vengeance, Rolf falls in with the Free Folk and soon gets embroiled in a much more momentous battle, against the evil Eastern Empire. Nothing very original here but it is a well-organised yarn that trots along steadily through landscapes full of disdainful demons and enigmatic artifacts of power, not the least of them the legendary Elephant, a slumbering metal beast with '426th ARMORED DIVISION' lettered on its flank...

Colin Greenland

Colin will be here again next month with more book and film reviews.

THE SWORD OF ALABRON

By Ian Williamson

OUR ADVENTURERS HAVE REACHED THE POINT OF NO RETURN IN A FROZEN UNDERGROUND WASTE.

LOOK, I VOLUNTEER TO GO BACK AND HAVE A FIRE READY WHEN YOU RETURN...

ONE MORE REMARK LIKE THAT AND YOU'RE GOING ON THE FIRE

THE CASTLE... 'TIS NIGH!

I SUGGEST WE ALL PUSH THE DOOR GENTLY, LEST WE AWAKEN SNOWDEMON.

YOO BETTA GETTA NOO DOOR DRAGEN.

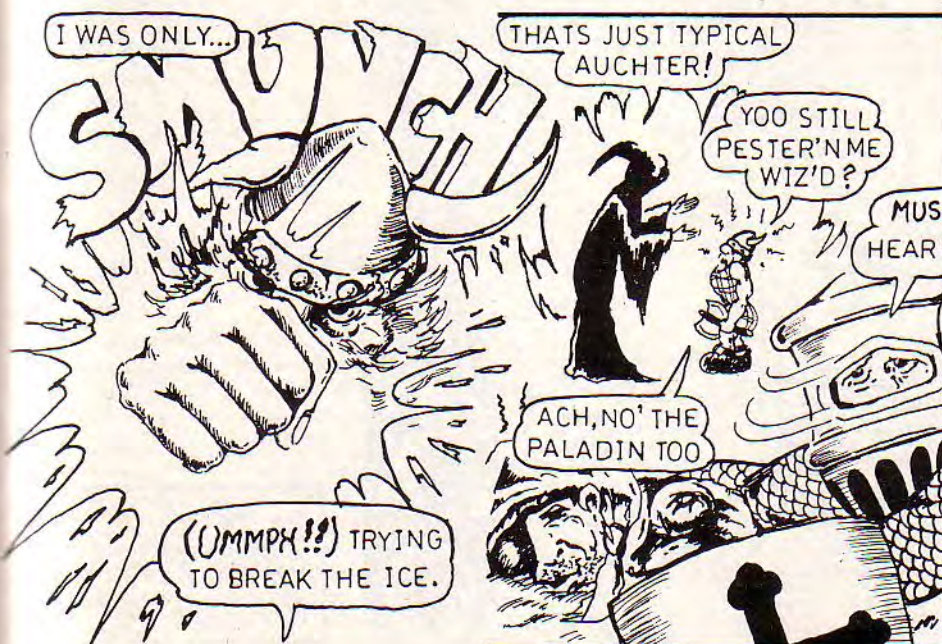
HEE "DRAGEN.. A'YOO LIS'NEN?

YOU KNOW SOMETHING? THAT DWARF REALLY MAKES ME SICK.

ACH, SHUT UP WIZ'D. YOO BIN GETT'N ORN MA NERVES SINCE WE START'D.

...D'NAE PLAY WI'YA BEETLE STONES! D'NAE BRING BOG! Y'CANNEE HAV' THE SPIDER! D'NAE DO THIS...D NAE DO TH-AT...YOO BIN GETT'N ORN MA NERVES WIZ'D.

I'LL RE-PHRASE THAT, "I SUGGEST WE ALL STRANGLE AUCHTER



'TIS SACRED ALABRONS. CALL..IT CALLS ME.



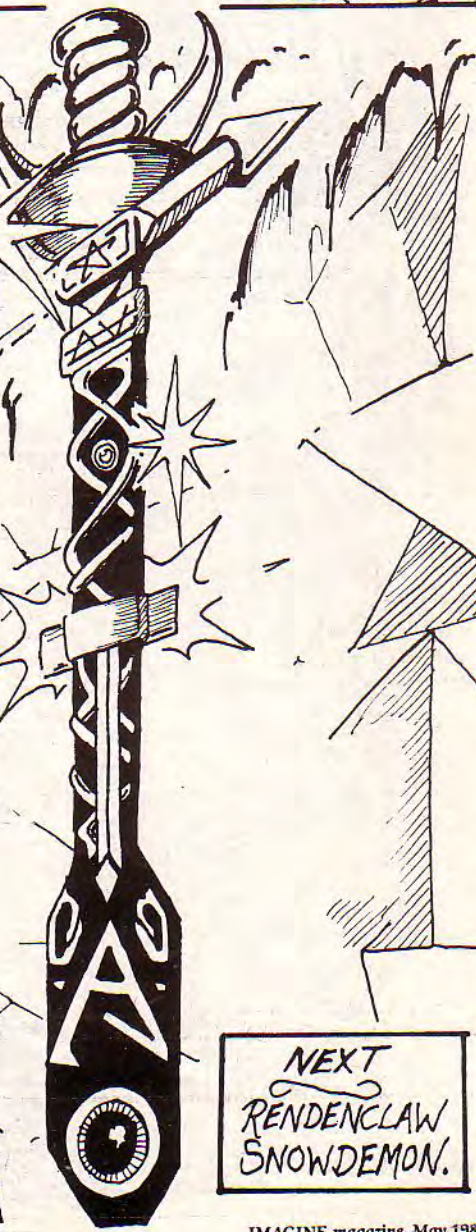
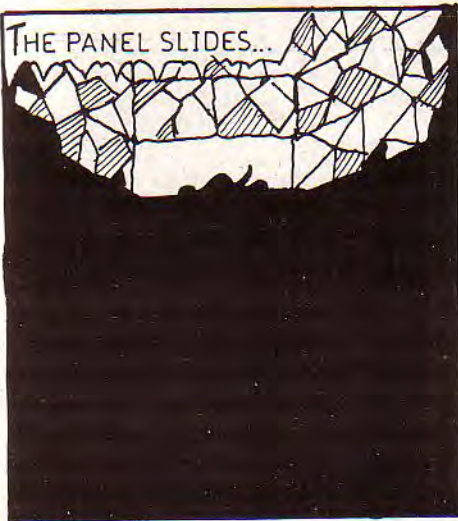
IF ITS THA' SHTOOPID SWORD Y'WANT. IT'S HEER BEHIND THIS SECRETY WALLY THING..

NO...WAIT.. AUCHTER!

YES...YES.. OPEN IT...



THE PANEL SLIDES...



NEXT
RENDENCLAW
SNOWDEMON.

Somewhere, on the other side of your imagination . . .



. . . is a world where magic really works, werewolves lurk in lonely forests, fell magicians plot in ruined towers, dragons roam the skies and ghosts stalk empty graveyards. You have your wits and a sword...

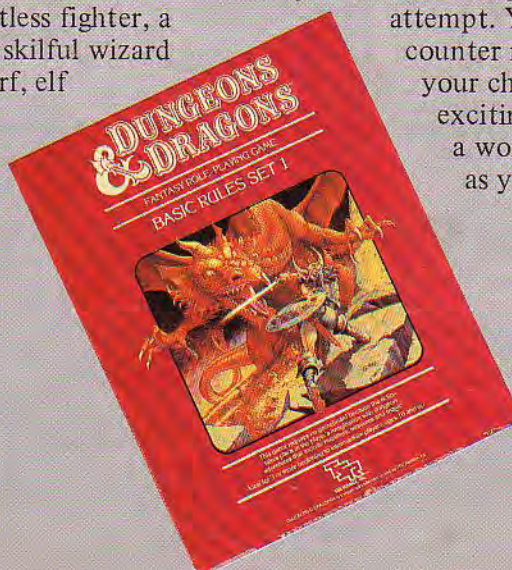
. . . and a role-playing game.

If you have ever read a book or seen a film and thought 'I wouldn't do that!' when the hero does something stupid, then role-playing games are for you. Imagine a story where you can make decisions and change the outcome, a story where you are the hero or heroine . . .

TSR's DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Basic Set contains everything that you need to free your imagination and start playing. Within 20 minutes you'll be on a quest.

This is what the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game is about. You take on the part of a character in a fantasy world. This character might be a dauntless fighter, a crafty thief or a skilful wizard — or even a dwarf, elf or halfling!

There is your imagination, guided by the rules, a few dice, pencils and paper. There are no limits to what you or the other players may attempt. You don't move a counter round a board — your character has exciting adventures in a world as fantastic as you want it to be.



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